



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





1

2

3

4

1

2

3

ALDA,

THE BRITISH CAPTIVE.





ALDA,

THE

BRITISH CAPTIVE.

BY

MISS AGNES STRICKLAND,

AUTHOR OF

"THE LIVES OF THE QUEENS OF ENGLAND," &c. &c.

LONDON :

JOSEPH RICKERBY, SHERBOURN LANE,
KING WILLIAM STREET, CITY.

1841.

LONDON:
J. RICKERBY, PRINTER, SHERBOURN LANE.

ALDA, THE BRITISH CAPTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

"The fates of war have given to me a master."

ÆSCHYLUS.

AMONG the illustrious captives who were doomed to grace the triumph which Rome decreed to her victorious general Paulinus, on the occasion of the signal overthrow which he had given to the Britons and their warrior-queen Boadicea, were the warlike prince Aldogern and his young daughter Alda.

Aldogern was nearly related to the unfortunate queen, and had held a high command in that disastrous battle where the light of freedom was

quenched in the life-blood of his unhappy countrymen for centuries of woe. He had vainly performed prodigies of valour that day, and it was not till he had seen his five brave sons slain by his side, and received many desperate wounds, that he was overpowered and made prisoner, while defending the chariot in which his youngest-born and best-loved child, the youthful Alda, was with her female slaves, in accordance with the customs of the Britons, who absurdly encumbered themselves with the helpless members of their families in their campaigns.

Neither the severe bodily sufferings, nor the anguish of mind with which the fall of his country, and his own sore bereavements, had overwhelmed the unhappy chief, were permitted to excuse him from the worst, the bitterest of his woes, that of being led through the streets of Rome with his weeping Alda to grace the triumph of the haughty victor.

The giddy and unfeeling multitude enjoyed the spectacle, and were loud in their plaudits,

and pressed with eager curiosity to gaze on the stern and silent barbarians, as they styled the majestic British chief and his fair-haired daughter. They rent the air with their acclamations ; they hung their votive garlands on the altars and porticos of every idolatrous temple in the city, and finally concluded the day with gluttony, riot, and inebriation, regardless of the anguish which oppressed the hearts of the forlorn strangers who had formed so attractive a part of their pageant.

That night Aldogern died, and his daughter, who had not yet completed her sixteenth year, was left a friendless and lonely orphan in a foreign land, to be disposed of in whatever manner her pitiless foes might think proper. The legion by which her father and herself were made prisoners was commanded by a Roman patrician named Marcus Lælius, who claimed the young Alda as part of his share of the spoils, and placed her under the absolute authority of his only daughter.

Lælia was only a few months older than the captive Briton ; she was the heiress of great

wealth, and had been accustomed from her birth to the most pernicious indulgence. Surrounded by trembling slaves, over whom she exercised the most despotic authority, she was a spoiled and wayward votary of pleasure, and the victim of ungovernable irritability. Her evil passions had been fostered by the mistaken fondness of her father, till pride, selfishness, and revenge became the leading traits of her character. Unfortunately for Alda, she too nearly resembled her imperious mistress in her faults, and the Divine influence of religion was alike unknown to both. Alda had been instructed by the Druids in their mystic creed, which, though equally erroneous, was at any rate of a sublimer nature than the gross fables of the Greek and Roman mythology ; and she regarded the rites and ceremonies of their idol worship with unfeigned horror and contempt, while she clung to the early impressions which she had received in her own land with a degree of firmness that might have done honour to the professors of a purer faith.

In the house of Marcus Lælius were united in the hard lot of bondage the natives of many countries; and it was melancholy to observe how little sympathy these associates in misfortune manifested for each other. Intent only on improving their own condition, they remained insensible to every sorrow but their own, and when a fresh individual was added to their number, they appeared to experience a cruel satisfaction in persecuting the unhappy one in every possible way.

Among all the female slaves of Marcus Lælius there was only one who testified the slightest pity for the unhappy Alda when she first appeared among them. This was a young Christian convert of Judean race and birth named Susanna. When the Greek, Numidian, Egyptian, and Parthian slaves gathered provokingly round the young British captive with rude expressions of wonder at the fairness of her skin, the strangeness of her attire and ornaments, and the extraordinary colour of her large blue eyes,—which they with true national prejudice pronounced to be exceedingly frightful,

because they were so different from their own,—Susanna reproved them for the unfeelingness of their conduct, which she represented could not fail of being exceedingly offensive to the sorrowful stranger, although from not understanding their language she was spared the knowledge of many of the personal insults they addressed to her.

It was however impossible for Alda to mistake looks and gestures so unequivocal as were those of her fellow-slaves, and she was not slow in replying to them with glances of angry disdain, which only added to the barbarous pleasure they appeared to take in tormenting her. At length she was provoked so far as to vent her indignation in her native tongue. Then their mirth knew no bounds; and forgetful that their own language must sound full as strangely in the ears of the young Briton, they danced round her and laughed in the most immoderate manner: but when they proceeded to pull the long yellow tresses that floated in bright luxuriant ringlets over her ivory shoulders, the enraged and insulted stranger be-

came furious, and resented this personal attack in so prompt and fierce a manner, that her persecutors fled precipitately from the apartment, and hastened to lay a formal complaint of her conduct before their lady. With one consent they protested that no consideration should induce them to admit her to sleep in their common apartment.

Neither commands, threats, nor reasonings on the part of those in authority over them could prevail upon the slaves to alter their determination on this point. They were unanimous in their declaration that they would rather incur any punishment than permit her to share their dormitory, As to becoming her bedfellow, there was not one among them, except Susanna, who would listen with patience to such a proposal.

Susanna, however, saw no terrors in the company of the unfortunate Alda, and she voluntarily proposed to the superintendent of the household that Alda should share with her a solitary dilapidated chamber at the top of the house, of which no use was made by the family on account

of a murder having been formerly committed there. This plan was readily adopted, to the satisfaction of all parties except Alda, who was perfectly ignorant of the nature of the long and angry debate that had taken place on her account, and who made an ungracious return to Susanna for her kind and compassionate interference in her behalf. But Susanna looked for no other reward than the approbation of her own conscience, and the pleasure of doing good; and in obedience to the heavenly precepts of the faith to which she was a sincere convert, endeavoured by every office of compassion and benevolence to mitigate the hardships and soothe the sorrows of the friendless stranger, whose lot she considered more truly pitiable than that of her other companions in bondage.

To each and all of these she had extended every service in her power; and there is much, very much in the power of even the humblest individual to perform for the benefit of their fellow-creatures. Susanna had been the nurse, the phy-

sician, the comforter, the monitress, and assistant of each in turn. Did any one require aid or advice in a task of difficulty, to whom did they turn but to the young Judean slave? Was any accident to be repaired, who so wise to counsel, or so skilful to execute as she? If a fault or irreparable misfortune required to be acknowledged, who would undertake the peril of revealing it to the irritable and unreasonable Lælia, but the mild and patient, yet courageous Susanna?

Her virtues, her sweetness of temper, and actively useful qualities, could not fail of being valued among her fellow-slaves: even the haughty Alda felt (who could do otherwise?) the tender pity and delicately-rendered services of Susanna; for oh! how consoling it is for any one to meet with sympathy and kindness in a land of strangers, and in the house of bondage!

CHAPTER II.

"Too little schooled in grief to bear
Thy own stern pride's control."—STEBBING.

HIGHLY born and fondly cherished, Alda's first adversity came heavily upon her : it was a startling reverse of fortune, to be deprived at one blow of princely station, wealth, friends, and freedom, and reduced to the forlorn condition of an orphan and a slave.

She had seen her only surviving parent, when dying of his wounds, and the sorer pangs of mortal sorrow, paraded through the streets of Rome to gratify the barbarous triumph of an insulting mob. She had with a breaking heart received his last breath, and vainly opposed her feeble resistance to the brutal violence of those who tore

his lifeless body from her fond arms, to consign it to that dishonouring gulf where the Romans flung the corpses of slaves and malefactors ; and she had been dragged to the house of a pitiless master in the very climax of her agony and despair.

Resignation was a feeling unknown to Alda, and the wrongs she had endured had the effect of rendering her desperate, fierce, and sullen. To her fellow-slaves she returned scorn for scorn ; she positively refused to perform any of the daily tasks that were allotted to her, and opposed useless resistance and passionate taunts to the authority of those under whose absolute power she found herself placed.

Solitary confinement, deprivation of food, and severe corporeal punishments were the only results of her wayward resistance to the commands of her tyrannical young mistress, who appeared to take a cruel pleasure in exercising her harsh authority over the young barbarian, as she insultingly called the fallen princess, and endeavoured,

by every means in her power, to humble her fierce unconquerable spirit. Alda was not of a disposition to yield to circumstances; her resolution was inflexible, and her obstinacy increased with every trial that was laid upon her.

“You may kill me!” she would exclaim to her merciless mistress, “but you cannot force me to obey you. I was born free, and a princess, and I will never serve a Roman subject. You call me a barbarian, but I am wiser and more enlightened than to render worship to senseless images such as you bow down before with blind homage;” and she pointed with a scornful gesture to the household gods of Marcus Lælius.

“Impious savage!” returned Lælia, striking her; “dare you insult the images of the gods?”

“Ay dare I! and more than that,” replied the fierce Briton, dashing the images against the marble floor, “I fear your gods as little as I do their ignorant worshippers. If they be indeed possessed of the divine and awful attributes of gods, let them now arise and revenge themselves upon

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

113

114

115

116

117

118

119

120

beer. 11-

was a 11-

11- 11- 11-


with horror and consternation, and he hastened to the spot, breathing vengeance against the impious perpetrator of the deed. When he beheld his broken idols, he uttered the most piteous lamentations over their fragments, and earnestly endeavoured to appease what he supposed to be the just anger of the gods, and to avert the calamity which he dreaded would befall his house, by prayers and promises of offerings in the temples of the offended deities. Then roused to a fresh burst of wrathful indignation on observing the scornful laughter with which the young Briton regarded his dismay and vexation, he turned furiously to her and exclaimed, "Wretch, what doom do you expect?"

"Death," she calmly replied; "and let it come in whatever form it may, I am prepared to meet it, not merely with composure, but with exultation, since it will be the means of releasing my free spirit from the yoke of a Roman master."

"Death, then, is your desire, untameable barbarian," returned Marcus Lælius: "but our ac-

count is not so easily settled; and I therefore sentence you not to death, but to such a severe infliction of corporeal punishment as shall be more hard to bear than death."

Resistance, passionate reproaches, and revilings on the part of Alda only served to aggravate her already desperate case. It is true she endured with the most unshrinking fortitude the infliction of Marcus Lælius's vengeance; and refusing to make the slightest concession, she suffered sternly and silently till exhausted nature could endure no more, and she sunk into a swoon so long and deathlike, that neither the infliction of pain nor the application of restoratives could restore suspended animation, but she remained without sense or motion, perfectly unconscious of everything around her. In this state she was left by her persecutors; and of her fellow-slaves, though all in turn had experienced the cruelty of either Marcus Lælius or his daughter, none offered to soothe or support the friendless stranger. Regardless of her tender youth, her heavy misfortunes, and the



outrages and sufferings she had undergone, or absorbed in feelings of selfish apprehension for themselves, they left her to the loneliness and bitterness of her fate. True, her manners to each and all of them had been fierce, haughty, and unconciliating. She had been for many months an inhabitant of the same house with them ; but she had refused to associate herself in their toils, their tasks, and pleasures, holding herself at a haughty distance from them, confining her griefs to her own bosom, and rejecting the kind offices of the only one among them who had offered her sympathy or friendship.

When Alda at length recovered from her long swoon, and perceived that she was alone, she experienced a sense of bitterness in finding herself deserted in her misery, even by Susanna. She glanced round the solitary apartment in mingled anguish and disdain, while her young heart swelled almost to bursting as she contrasted the present desolation of her lot with her former splendid destiny. She essayed, but in vain, to

raise her stiffened and bleeding limbs from the marble floor; and while she felt how precious would have been in that hour the friendly sympathy which she had so invariably and offensively rejected, she groaned aloud for very disquietude of spirit, and called upon death to end her sufferings.

“Death, poor maiden!” repeated the soft voice of the Judean damsel, who was nearer to her than she had imagined; “what, alas! are your hopes in a future state of existence, that you thus eagerly desire the close of this?” She seated herself on the ground beside Alda as she spoke, and raising her aching head, kindly supported it on her knees, while her fast-flowing tears bedewed the fevered and agonized features of the unhappy Briton, over whom she bent with the tenderest compassion. Susanna’s question had touched a chord of thrilling interest in the heart of the young captive, whose faded cheeks glowed, and her sad eyes kindled with a wild brightness, as she replied, with all the enthusiasm of her national

faith, the erring but not uncheering creed of the Druids, who maintained that the moment of dissolution was the entrance of a new state of existence.*

“Oh!” cried Alda, “that I could indeed make thee understand the feelings with which my spirit kindles at the thought of casting off its present earthly cumbrance, that wretched body which is no longer able to obey my soul’s free impulses, but

* It is scarcely possible to give a clearer or more beautiful explanation of this point of Druidical belief, than is to be found in the following nervous quotation from Lucan’s *Pharsalia*.

“If dying mortals’ dooms they sing aright,
No ghosts descend to dwell in dreadful night;
No parting souls to grisly Pluto go,
Nor seek the dreary silent shades below;
But forth they go, immortal in their kind,
And other bodies in new worlds they find.
Thus life for ever runs its endless race,
And like a line death but divides the space;
A stop that can but for a moment last,
A point between the future and the past;
Thrice happy they beneath their northern skies,
Who that worst fear, the fear of death, despise;
Hence they no cares for this frail being feel,
But rush undaunted on the pointed steel;
Provoke approaching fate, and bravely scorn
To spare that life which must so soon return.”

hath been degraded by the chains and ignominious stripes of a Roman master!" Then infuriated at the remembrance of her wrongs, she added fiercely, "Would that a weapon of vengeance were now in my hand, that I might slay the tyrant Marcus Lælius and his daughter."

"Thou wouldst not surely commit so deadly a crime as murder!" said Susanna, shuddering and averting her gaze from the terrible expression of Alda's flashing eyes.

"Yes! I would be revenged upon these enemies of my country, even though I were sentenced the next moment to pay the penalty of a death of torture; for death is to me new life, and tortures I can sustain unshrinkingly; yea, I have proved to these barbarous Romans this very day, that I can endure the worst infliction of their malice without a cry escaping me."

"Unhappy Alda!" returned her fellow-captive; "unhappy that thou hast fallen into such cruel hands; but more truly to be pitied in this, that thou art subject to a harder bondage than theirs,

even that of the power of evil, who stirreth up thine own fierce and stormy passions to become the workers of thine eternal ruin."

"You speak in riddles," replied Alda impatiently; "I know of no evil power except that of the Romans."

"Think you, Alda, that the Romans could of themselves do the things which have incurred your hatred? Are they braver than your countrymen that thus they prevail against them?"

Alda replied eagerly that the Britons were of loftier stature and more robust frames than the Romans; and assuredly of a more fearless spirit, since nothing could induce them to submit to such outrages as the Emperor Nero daily perpetrated against the best and mightiest of his subjects."

"How is it then that these abject slaves of a man by no means distinguished either for deeds of arms or superior wisdom, should have become the absolute masters of your free-spirited,

hardy, and valiant countrymen?" asked Susanna.

Alda looked down for a few moments in deep thought ; at length she replied, " It is because the Supreme Ruler of gods and men frowns upon our battles : surely he has been offended, and suffers our foes to triumph over us as a punishment for our faults."

" You are right, Alda," said Susanna, for without His permission the Romans could not have done these things. The battle is not always to the strong, nor the race to the swift."

" But," said Alda thoughtfully, " how is it that we can have so fearfully incurred his displeasure that he should thus give us up as a prey to the sons of the stranger ?"

" You offend him daily by your idolatrous and mistaken manner of serving him, although you have hitherto sinned ignorantly," replied Susanna.

" It is false !" retorted Alda angrily ; " we render worship truly and reverently, according to

all the rites and observances enjoined by the Druids."

"When the blind follow the guidance of the blind, shall not both fall?" rejoined Susanna.

- Alda was both surprised and offended at this remark: "You might," she said, "apply that observation with justice to the ignorant and superstitious Romans, who in obedience to their knavish priests bow down before the works of their own hands, like these poor brittle fragments of Marcus Lælius and his daughter's trust." She pointed to the broken images of the Lares and Penates, and laughed scornfully.

"Your own belief, Alda, though less gross and childish, is equally erroneous, equally remote from the truth, as that of the idolatrous Romans."

"How can that be, when I hold firmly the faith which has been inculcated by the Druids themselves?—those holy men who, in the profound solitudes of their consecrated groves, receive personal intimation of the will of the supreme powers by whom all things were formed, and by

whose divine wisdom all things are governed. And can *they*, think you, err who are honoured with actual communion with those who direct the courses of the stars, of the sun, and of the moon, who shape the viewless paths of the winds, and order the fluxes and refluxes of the mighty waters?"

"Not only, Alda, do these men err, but they commit the greater sin of making others to err, by deceiving them with fabulous pretences of revelations from on high, which they have never received."

Alda indignantly, and with all the eloquence of which she was mistress, essayed to convince Susanna of the truth, purity, and excellence of the theology of the Druids; and provoked at the coolness with which Susanna confuted her arguments, which were founded on no better grounds than assertion, unsubstantiated by proof, she concluded with saying, "You have chosen to regard the calamities that have befallen the Britons as indications of the divine displeasure, because

our worship is not in accordance with your own. I am not acquainted with your mode of belief, nor do I wish to be; for if it be indeed so much more agreeable in the sight of the all-powerful Director of human events, how is it that I see you included in the like misfortune with myself, a stranger in a foreign land, far from your country and kindred, and subjected to the cruel tyranny of a Roman master?"

"Whatever is the will of the Lord, is well pleasing in the sight of his servant," replied Susanna meekly. "And what if it be His pleasure to lead me through thorny paths to regions of eternal bliss, by making me a humble instrument for revealing his glorious light in a land of heathen darkness, even in this proud but benighted city of Rome, where as yet the beams of heavenly irradiation have but faintly glimmered? And who knoweth, Alda, but that you also may have been conducted hither, through many sorrows, in order that you might be instructed in those things which concern your eternal peace?"

The dark eyes of Susanna filled with tears of holy rapture as she concluded, and folding the wondering Alda to her bosom, she imprinted a sister's kiss upon her fair brow.

Alda felt but could not comprehend the cause of her fellow-captive's strong emotion. She was touched with the tenderness of her manner towards herself, for the languor of bodily sufferings had somewhat abated the haughty fierceness of her mood, and she did not refuse to listen to the divine truths of revelation which the young Christian convert eloquently poured into her passive ear. But when Susanna proceeded to speak of the necessity of humility and self-denial and forgiveness of injuries, as well as entire resignation to the Divine will, Alda grew impatient of a doctrine in such complete variance with all her preconceived opinions and stubborn prejudices, especially those that related to her own importance, on which she presumptuously valued herself.

She insisted on the prerogatives of her royal



blood and high rank, and refused to become exalted in a future life at the price of self-abasement in the present ; she justified her faults, and the very mention of forgiveness of injuries excited her to a fresh transport of indignation and fury against Marcus Lælius and his daughter. She fiercely expatiated upon her wrongs and sufferings, and expressed the most vehement desire of revenge upon them and the whole Roman people, and invoked the wrath of the gods of her country upon them in a strain of imprecation that both shocked and terrified her meek companion, till overcome with the violence of her emotions, and the bodily weakness occasioned by her late sufferings, she relapsed once more into insensibility.

Grieved but not surprised at the result of her first attempt to instruct the haughty and passionate Alda in the Christian faith, Susanna assisted in conveying the unhappy girl to her miserable pallet, trusting that when sickness and sorrow should have in some degree subdued her obdurate and vindictive temper, she might be enabled to

renew the subject with better success, for she saw that Alda was as yet too new to affliction to endure the voice of reason, or even to accept of consolation in any form or from any source.

CHAPTER III.

“ Oh yet I hear the trembling spirit sigh,
It is a dread, an awful thing to die ! ”—CAMPBELL.

A RAGING fever succeeded the agitation and sufferings of that dreadful day, and for many weeks the life of the unfortunate Alda remained in the greatest jeopardy. She had never before known an hour's illness, and it now came heavily upon her in her forlorn condition. Remote as she was from every tie of kindred and of country ; yet was she not forsaken in her sore distress, for the compassionate Susanna hovered like a ministering angel round her sick couch with the tenderest offices of love and pity ; and during the whole of this melancholy period she watched and tended her with the most unremitting care, although her daily tasks were strictly exacted from her by her

tyrannical mistress, who would not excuse her from the least tittle of her accustomed duties on account of the fatigue and loss of rest she experienced in nursing the British captive.

Susanna preserved her mild magnanimity under all the revilings and punishments that followed the non-performance of certain things which her close attendance upon the suffering Alda rendered impossible for her to execute. Nor was her patience conquered, although severely tried, by the restless and feverish irritability of the sick Briton, who not unfrequently repaid all her exertions with reproaches.

Her health, it is true, suffered in consequence ; but her mild temper remained unaltered, and she rose superior to every trial that the tyranny of Lælia or the impatience of Alda could impose upon her.

It was not however in nature that Alda could remain insensible to the tender and affectionate sympathy and care of her young nurse, who hung over her like a fond sister, anticipating her wants,

and endeavouring to comply with her most unreasonable demands, soothing her with words of comfort, and shedding silent tears of soft compassion at witnessing sufferings she could not alleviate. By degrees she became so dear to the young Briton that she appeared to supply to her the place of all she had lost, and more than she had lost; for no tie of kindred that Alda had ever possessed had been so truly precious to her as the friendship of her generous fellow-captive, and she would have considered the deprivation of her society as the greatest calamity that could now befall her. Yet selfish in most things, and unreasonable in all, if Susanna's imperative duties obliged her to absent herself from her bedside, she would reproach her in the most vehement manner for leaving her, and manifest passionate displeasure at her so doing.

One afternoon Susanna appeared more than usually intent upon a large piece of embroidery, which she was pursuing in the chamber of her sick friend; and Alda, who felt a secret dissatis-

faction whenever Susanna's attention was diverted from herself, said in a querulous tone, "I wish you would lay aside that tiresome embroidery on which you have been employing yourself for so many hours, and come and attend to me."

"Do you require any particular service of me just now, Alda?" asked Susanna without looking up.

"Yes," returned Alda, "I want you to sit on my pallet, and hold my hand, and endeavour to sing me to sleep with one of your sweet Hebrew songs."

Susanna shook her head: "Alda, it is impossible just now, for I have neglected my tasks so much during your illness that Lælia has become much exasperated, and has commanded me to complete this needlework before night, which I can scarcely accomplish even if I work without the slightest interruption."

Alda like Lælia had been accustomed to the unbounded indulgence of her wayward will, and though no longer in a condition to exact such un-

qualified submission to her wishes, she nevertheless endeavoured to obtain her point, of the only creature over whom she possessed the slightest degree of influence; so she said in a reproachful tone to Susanna, "And will you then prefer gratifying your imperious Roman mistress in her unjust exactions to ministering to my wants?"

"Alas, my dear Alda, can you doubt what would be my conduct if the choice rested with me?" returned Susanna tenderly. "But I am a slave you know, and having no free will of my own must be subservient to those who are in authority over me."

"You are of a different spirit from me," observed Alda, "for I never did render obedience to a Roman, and I never will."

"Believe me, where no sinful compliance is required, submission is not only the wisest but the most dignified course of proceeding, especially in a case like ours, where resistance is perfectly unavailing," returned Susanna.

"I cannot listen to you with patience," inter-

rupted Alda angrily ; and turning her face to the wall she continued sullen and silent, till Susanna, fearing that an indulgence in these feelings might aggravate her illness, put by her embroidery-frame, and seating herself beside her, devoted herself entirely to her amusement. Alda, who exulted like a spoiled and wayward child in having obtained her desire, rewarded her compliance with the fondest caresses, and became so unusually cheerful that Susanna scarcely thought of the peril she was herself incurring by the neglect of the positive commands of her imperious mistress, till Alda had fallen into a composed slumber. She then, gently withdrawing her hand from her hold, returned to her task, at which she worked with redoubled assiduity ; and although hopeless of completing it within the appointed time, she resolved that no exertions for that purpose should be omitted on her part. But the precious hour of steady light that had been lost in gratifying Alda's wayward caprice was irretrievable ; and in spite of all her endeavours to keep pace with the

rapid flight of time, the autumn day appeared to hasten to its close earlier than usual, and the dusky shades of twilight at length darkened the lattices of the gloomy apartment. She then ventured to expend a moment in ascertaining how much of her work remained yet unfinished, and perceived with dismay that full two hours of clear light would be required to bring it to a conclusion. She lighted her lamp, but found it would be impossible to arrange her shades with any degree of accuracy by the uncertain glimmering of its faint and doubtful beams. While she was yet deliberating upon what course to pursue, she received a summons to attend her mistress.

Susanna was incapable of attempting to shield herself by means of a subterfuge. She produced the unfinished work in silence; and in reply to Lælia's angry language, meekly requested her to be patient with her, and she would complete it before breakfast the next morning. But Lælia instead of listening to her, caused her to be beaten by one of the officers of the household.

Susanna submitted to the arbitrary sentence of her unjust and cruel mistress with her wonted mildness and equanimity ; nor did she offer to excuse herself by stating the true reason of her task remaining unfinished, for as she had voluntarily taken upon herself the office of nursing the unfortunate Alda, she was unwilling that Lælia should be reminded of the circumstance, lest she should separate her from the friendless stranger, who now clung to her as to her only solace.

Lælia, however, demanded of her from what cause it happened that she had of late so much neglected her duties. To which Susanna calmly replied, that “ it would be of little avail to explain the reasons of these omissions after she had suffered a heavy punishment for every fault of the kind that had occurred.”

“ Ha ! slave, dost thou think I will be trifled with ? ” returned Lælia angrily : “ I insist on knowing how that time has been employed which thou oughtest to have devoted to the performance of thy duties.”

Susanna remained silent ; but Zopha, a young Numidian slave, being willing to obtain her mistress's favour, said, " The reason, O noble lady, that the Judean damsel neglects her tasks is, because she spends her whole time in attending upon the rebellious British slave, the fair-haired Alda."

" Unkind and ungrateful Zopha !" returned Susanna ; " have I not watched beside thy couch also in the hour of sickness and sorrow, when, first a friendless stranger among thy foes, and unaccustomed to the hardships of slavery, thy spirit sunk beneath its burdens ?"

" I was then blind to the happiness that awaited me in serving a mistress who is to her slaves what the sun is to the flowers of the field, a fountain of glorious beneficence, goodness, and beauty," said Zopha. But her deceitful flattery failed to call a smile to the lips of the young Roman lady. Undeserved praise is to many more painful than the keenest censure, and Lælia, feeling conscious how ill she merited this hyperbolical

eulogium, turned haughtily from Zopha, and bade her "never again presume to insult her with adulation as unwelcome as it was insincere."

She then commanded Susanna to forbear from further offices of kindness and sympathy to the stubborn barbarian, as she called Alda.

"Alas!" said Susanna, "I am her only friend, and if I abandon her in her present weak and forlorn condition, she will die of pining grief, or perish for want of needful attendance. There is not another creature that will take compassion on the desolate stranger, if you deprive her of the trifling succour and solace of the only one who is willing to befriend her."


This appeal was lost upon the haughty Roman, who replied, "Solitude and neglect will perhaps humble her fierce spirit, and she may possibly submit to circumstances when she finds herself deprived of her coadjutor in rebellion."

Susanna in vain protested that she would exert all her influence over the mind of the young Briton to induce her to yield to the authority of

those whom the fortune of war had rendered her masters. Lælia was resolute in carrying this petty instance of cruel tyranny into effect ; and regardless of the entreaties and tears of Susanna, she caused her to be removed to a distant quarter of the palace and there confined, to prevent the possibility of her visiting her unfortunate fellow-captive by stealth.

When the young Briton found herself deserted, as she supposed, by her only friend, her anger and impatience so greatly aggravated her illness, as to occasion a severe access of fever. Sometimes she bitterly reproached Susanna for her supposed unkindness in forsaking her in her distress ; and at other moments, addressing her as if she were within hearing, she pathetically entreated her to return to her ; and if she heard a step near the solitary apartment, she extended her arms towards the door, and called upon her absent friend by every tender epithet to come to her once more. But she looked in vain for that sweet familiar face ; and it was to no purpose that she at length

reiterated her name in piercing cries. The echoes of her own sad voice alone answered her, from the gloomy recesses of her deserted chamber. Day after day passed over, and still Susanna came not, and Alda began to entertain apprehensions that her absence might proceed from some cause far worse than accident, neglect, or even illness. Slaves were a property commonly transferred from one master to another, and it was more than possible that her beloved Susanna might have been sold into other hands. It was a conjecture replete with anguish, and as the thought crossed the mind of the impatient Alda, she wrung her hands and wept wildly at the very possibility of such an aggravation of her misfortunes. Her food and water were always brought to her by an ill-natured old woman named Narsa, who was a sort of superintendent over the female slaves of Marcus Lælius's household. With this woman Alda had never deigned to exchange a word during the whole period of her captivity. She had been the first person from whom the fallen princess had





suffered restraint and blows, and she looked upon her with feelings of mingled hatred and disdain. Yet were her ardent longings after her only friend so powerful, and her desire of learning the cause of her unwonted absence so great, as not only to combat, but even to overcome her repugnance to addressing Narsa, and she actually requested her, in not merely a civil but a persuasive tone of voice, to inform her of the reason why she had not seen Susanna for so many days.

Narsa regarded her with a malicious scowl, and deigned her no answer; this conduct so greatly irritated the haughty Alda, that she gave way to a torrent of angry invectives, which of course injured no one but herself; and the unfeeling Narsa left her to vent her displeasure in solitude, uncared for and unpitied.

Delirium followed this violent effervescence of temper, and for days and nights Alda was insensible of everything but the burning pain, which prevented her from raising her aching head from the comfortless pillow on which it rested.

At length a more fearful crisis of her disorder approached,—she became conscious of her danger. Visions of horror seemed floating around her, and terrors with which she vainly struggled stole over her. Death was evidently near at hand ; but his approach brought none of those exulting transports with which she had, while yet afar off, invoked him as the friend and deliverer, through whose aid she should burst the chains of Roman bondage, and escaping from the hardships of exile and slavery, return to the green hills of her own beloved Britain, and behold once more the scenes of her childhood, and the friends of her heart, from whom she had been so long separated, and hear again the only language that possessed melody in her ear. It was with such feelings as I have described that the brilliant but false colours in which her national superstition had painted a future state to her erring imagination, had taught her to regard death. His dart was now suspended over her ; and though it seemed strange to herself, she



shrunk from it in trembling alarm, and prayed to the gods of her country that the bitter hour might pass away from her.


She endeavoured to reassure herself by recalling the oft-repeated declarations of the Druids on the subject of the transmigration of the soul; but they brought her no comfort, for she felt like a bewildered person who has followed a deceitful meteor to the edge of a perilous precipice, which it reveals, and then vanishing, leaves the wanderer in dread that his next step may be a plunge into its unfathomable gulfs. The spirit, the immortal spirit, perceived its danger, even through all the thick clouds of Pagan error, and the mists of partial aberration from reason.

The doctrine of Christianity, which Susanna had so earnestly laboured to inculcate, recurred to her mind. She was not sufficiently composed at that moment to be capable of drawing consolation from its divine promises of grace and mercy to the penitent believer. Her own theology was shaken,

yet the truths of revelation had been too recently and too cursorily heard to have had the effect of conquering prejudices strong as life itself, nor had the slightest spark of faith been kindled within her proud and obdurate heart.

Yet when Susanna had reasoned with her on the certainty of judgment to come, and punishment in a future state of existence for sins committed in this, and set before her the awful alternatives of an eternity of happiness or misery to the disembodied spirit, in opposition to the fanciful theory of the Druids, she had trembled even while she protested that she could not, and she would not believe things so opposed to her own will—although she had no better grounds on which to rest her reasons for dissent, than the bare assertions of mere mortals like herself, whose interest it might be to deceive and mislead their followers, in order to obtain the greater influence over their minds.

All this recurred to Alda in this gloomy moment ; fearfulness and a horrible shuddering seized




upon her, and she laboured with all her strength to obtain some clearer conviction on which to ground her hopes for a future state.

While she was bewildered in a maze of doubts and inquietudes, a confused slumber stole over her ; but her thoughts, even in sleep, were actively engaged upon the important subject which had so deeply engrossed them for the last few hours. She dreamt that her spirit had already passed from its earthly mansion, and stood trembling in the presence of a Being whose infinite splendour and majesty, far surpassing all she had ever heard or imagined of the glorious attributes of the Supreme Controller of gods and men, filled her with awe and admiration, and she shrunk before his searching glance, humbled and abashed, with an overwhelming sense of her own nothingness and worthlessness.

In the midst of her terror and confusion she felt herself called upon by that Power whom she could neither resist nor deceive, to render an account of all her actions in the flesh. In an agony of fear

and consternation, she strove in vain to recollect one purely good and amiable action to counter-balance the mass of evil thoughts, words, and deeds that she was forced to record against herself. Things long forgotten, or accounted of no importance, rushed in a dark flood upon her mind, to swell the fatal list of her too well-remembered offences, so that the whole tenor of her life now appeared to have been one course of pride, anger, hatred, revenge, obstinacy, and ingratitude.

By the natural law of conscience, which is implanted by Heaven in the breasts of all human beings, she stood condemned ; yet she clung to the miserable hope that she should be permitted to renew her pilgrimage upon earth, in a new, though possibly inferior state of being. Then she was told “that her preparation was ended—that she had been weighed in the balances and was found wanting—that she had abused the time and opportunities that had been granted to her upon earth, and must now prepare for an eternity of misery, for her portion was allotted



with all the wicked and evil doers from the beginning of the world."

A fiery abyss then yawned at her feet, in which she found herself suddenly engulfed, and discovered, to her inexpressible horror, that Marcus Lælius, his daughter, and many others of her persecutors were to be her companions in everlasting torments and despair—with a wild shriek she exclaimed, "The Druids promised me a renewal of life in new worlds to all eternity."

But an awful voice replied, in accents that shook the heavens and earth with thunder, "The Druids have deceived you! and therefore have they received to themselves a greater condemnation." At the same moment she perceived numbers of that order whom she had been accustomed to regard as the sacred delegates of the gods, hurried into a deeper gulf of unspeakable horror than that into which she was herself plunged, while the Roman priests of Jupiter, Venus, Mars, and Saturn appeared devoted to even greater misery. But the thought of her own doom of everlasting

woe swallowed up all other feelings. The fiery roof of this dismal abode of gloom and sorrow began to close over her head; she beheld for the last time the faces of the good and happy—the earth was lost to her sight—the heavens grew dark—the sun was diminished to a dim star in the immeasurable distance—and as the last glimmering of light was shut out from her for ever, despair reached its climax, and she exclaimed with a piercing cry of anguish and regret, “The Druids have deceived me; and I perish everlastingly!” And with that exclamation she awoke. The cold drops of terror stood on her brow, and every limb shook with an universal tremor; but the fearful vision had passed away, and she found herself tenderly enfolded in the kind arms of Susanna, who was seated beside her feverish couch, watching over her troubled slumbers with anxious solicitude.

Alda still trembled violently, and precipitating herself into the arms of her friend, she clung to her with convulsive energy, as if she derived pro-

tection and safety from her vicinity, while with shuddering horror she explained to her the cause of her affright and agonizing exclamations.

A glow of holy enthusiasm brightened the pale cheek of the young Christian as she listened, and raising her clasped hands and glistering eyes to heaven, she murmured, "Blessed be the name of the Lord, for he hath listened to the voice of my humble supplication ! O Alda, my sister," she added, turning to the young Briton, "join thy voice with mine in glorifying the mighty God who hath poured the light upon thy sleeping eye, and 'warned thee in a dream to flee from the wrath to come.' Rejoice, my sister, and fear not, for thou shalt not die, but live to declare His name, and become a humble instrument to make known unto others the riches of His grace." She then once more explained to Alda the means and the way of eternal life, for Alda was ready to exclaim, as the jailer did to Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" listened meekly and reverently to the words of divine truth, and

being thoroughly convinced of her danger, embraced the means of salvation with the same feelings of joy and gratitude with which the drowning mariner seizes the floating plank which enables him to reach the shore. Nor did the precepts of the Christian faith lose aught of their persuasive power in flowing from the lips of one who was willing not only to uphold them in her life, but, if required, to testify them to death itself unshrinkingly, and to seal the sincerity of her profession with her blood, if such a test should be demanded of her.

When Alda at length acknowledged that nothing but a sense of her deep unworthiness prevented her from becoming a follower of Christ, Susanna in a transport of holy joy called upon the young Briton to adore with her the inscrutable wisdom of Divine Providence which had, while the very names of their respective countries were as yet unknown to each other, removed the one from the east, and the other from the west, and united them in bondage under the same mas-

ter, to the end that the Judean convert might become the instrument of leading the Gentile stranger into the field of the Heavenly Shepherd of whose flock she was a humble member, and who wouldeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.

“Once, Alda,” continued she, “exile seemed bitter to my stubborn spirit, and slavery to a foreign people a heavy yoke. I could not understand the mercy and wisdom of my Heavenly Father, and I rebelliously thought he dealt hardly with me when it pleased him to afflict me with many sorrows, and to remove me from the land of my birth, and the ties of relationship and love. Many were the burning tears which I gave to those dear remembrances, refusing to be comforted for the loss of things which were doubtless taken from me in mercy, since our blessed Lord hath expressly declared that whoever prizes such more than Him is not worthy of Him. And what, O my beloved Alda, are country, kindred, and

friends in comparison with Him by whom they were bestowed? ‘ Lover and friend hath he put far from me, and mine acquaintance out of mind.’ He hath removed me into a land of strangers, and my name is forgotten in mine own city. Mine inheritance also hath passed to another, and my father’s house hath ceased in our tribe. But why should I mourn for these things? ‘ The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.’ He hath fed me with the bread of sorrow and the water of affliction, but he hath wiped the tears from mine eyes, and hath abundantly comforted me for all that I have suffered. For he hath made himself known to me in the season of my sorrow, and hath given me better things than those for which I so blindly lamented, even his love, and that ineffable peace which passeth all human understanding, such, my Alda, as he will give to you also, and to all who love him truly.”

Alda listened with emotion, though she could not as yet enter into those transports of rapturous

devotion with which the heart of Susanna overflowed.

The memory of all she had lost was too fresh in her remembrance, and the love of her country was too closely entwined about her heart, to admit of her rejoicing in a destiny which had torn her from everything that was dear to her soul. Although she so far conquered her rebellious spirit as to join Susanna in saying, "It is the Lord who hath done this, and let His will be done on earth even as it is in heaven," and tried to think that it was in mercy that she had been humbled, yet her heart would not admit the influence of the words that her lips pronounced. Her reason had indeed acknowledged the strong truths of Christianity, but her nature was still unchanged, for regeneration is not the work of an hour.

CHAPTER IV.

The noblest worship of the Power above,
Is to extol, and imitate His love ;
Not to forgive our enemies alone,
But use our bounty, that they may be won.

EDMUND WALLER.

THE conversation between the two friends had been on a subject too deeply interesting to both, to admit at first of any explanation on the part of Susanna respecting her sudden absence and unexpected return. At length, in reply to Alda's eager demand wherefore she had been a stranger to her sick chamber for so many days, she informed her of the evil consequences that had resulted from the non-performance of her prescribed task. Alda, instead of reflecting that her friend's misfortune had been occasioned by her selfishly and uselessly engrossing the precious time that would otherwise have been devoted to that pur-

pose, and blaming herself in consequence as the primary cause of all Susanna had suffered, expressed the most vehement indignation against the unjust and cruel Lælia, on whom she lavished the bitterest epithets that scorn and hatred could suggest.

“Hush, hush! mistaken Alda,” said Susanna, interrupting her; “this language is in direct and sinful opposition to the divine precepts of that holy religion to which you have professed yourself a convert, and must not be indulged.”

“Do not you, Susanna, both hate and despise this insolent Roman girl, who has treated you so barbarously?”

“No, Alda,” returned Susanna, “I dare not cherish such sentiments against an erring fellow-creature. As I hope to have my own offences forgiven, so must I forgive all wherein I have been offended against; or how should I be a follower of the God who hath said, ‘I will have mercy and not sacrifice?’ and again, ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may

be the children of your Father which is in Heaven ; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.’”

“But,” interrupted Alda, impatiently, “do you love Lælia, Susanna ?”

“No, Alda, I have not yet been able to obtain such a victory over the proud and evil passions of my nature. I do not love Lælia, I acknowledge, though I sincerely forgive her her trespasses against myself ; and I can and do pray that they may be also forgiven by my Heavenly Father, and that He will be pleased to have mercy upon her, and to change her heart.”

“Now I know the true God, I mean to pray to Him to avenge all my injuries upon the Roman people in general, and to bring upon them the calamities with which they have afflicted my own country, and in particular to punish Lælia and her father in a signal manner for all the outrages and cruelties they have committed against us,” said the young Briton.

Susanna shook her head reprovingly : “ It grieves me,” she said, “ to see how little of the spirit of Christianity hath as yet entered your heart, Alda, and that you should presume to contemplate addressing such a petition to that God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and hath only promised to blot out your offences on the express condition of your forgiving those of your enemies. Besides, Alda, if you beheld things in their proper light, you would rather regard Lælia as an object of pity than of anger.”

“ Of pity !” echoed Alda in astonishment ; “ how can she be an object of pity when she is at the very summit of wealth and greatness, surrounded with splendour and luxury, and attended by slaves of every nation under the sun, over whom she exercises the most unbounded authority ?”

“ Ah, Alda, thinkest thou that she is the happier for the possession of that power which she so much abuses, and which is therefore to her an occasion of falling ? She says, ‘ I am rich and in-

creased of goods, and in need of nothing ;' and knoweth not that she is wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, and more truly to be pitied than the most persecuted of her slaves to whom the ways of peace have been made known."

"She deserves to be unhappy," rejoined Alda: "she ought not to be pitied, and I wish she may be miserable."

"She can scarcely be more so than she is," returned Susanna, "for her punishment is always present with her, even her own unreasonable and most unhappy temper, which is a greater evil to herself than to those upon whom she vents its violence. She does not commit a single unkind or unjust action which does not recoil upon herself, for in every crime there is a sting more sharp than that of a scorpion. But, Alda, let me once more warn you that your vindictive spirit is no less offensive in the sight of God, than the oppressions of which Lælia has been guilty; perhaps even more so, for the light of the Gospel has never been revealed to her."

“Susanna, I will not deceive you; I cannot forgive Lælia, and I should not compassionate her if I saw her suffering as much as she has inflicted upon me, for justice requires that she should so suffer.”

“Ah, Alda, if justice were executed upon all who have offended against their fellow-creatures, should you escape sentence think you? And if God were extreme to mark the sins that are committed against himself, who might hope to go unpunished?”

Alda, who felt some reluctance to answering these home questions, changed the conversation by asking Susanna how she had been able to revisit her chamber, after the measures Lælia had taken to prevent her from so doing.

Susanna told her in reply, that Lælia while walking in the garden had been severely stung by a swarm of bees, which settled on her face and neck, and was in such agony with the pain she suffered in consequence, that the physicians who were summoned to her assistance declared that

unless some means were found of allaying the anguish of the stings, delirium and perhaps death would follow in the course of a few hours.

Marcus Lælius was in the greatest distress at the idea of his daughter's danger, and promised a large reward to any one who should be able to devise means to alleviate her sufferings, which the physicians confessed they were unable to do. On this one of the slaves whom Susanna had cured of the bite of a scorpion, mentioned her to his lord, who immediately caused her to be summoned to his daughter's aid.

Notwithstanding all the boasted perfection to which the arts had been carried at Rome, and the refinements, luxuries, and excessive polish to which everything ornamental had arrived, the science of medicine was as yet in its infancy, and nations which they styled barbarous far outstripped them in this most useful of all knowledge.

Susanna, in common with many of the females


of the East, especially of Judea, was skilled in pharmacy, and possessed of secrets in medicine which would have been esteemed valuable in a more enlightened age than the first century. This, combined with great observation, acute judgment, and composure of mind, enabled her to render great assistance to her fellow-creatures in many instances where the Roman physicians had been completely baffled: Lælia's case she soon perceived was by no means of that desperate nature which their want of skill had taught them to believe, and she presently prepared a lotion which had the beneficial effect of allaying the anguish of the stings; and in the course of a few hours Lælia was so much better as to express her unfeigned gratitude for the relief she had experienced; and Marcus Lælius, in pursuance of his promise, told Susanna she might name her own reward for the service she had performed.

Susanna simply requested permission to attend on the sick British captive during the remaining

period of her illness, whatever might be the term of its duration, which was granted, not without some surprise on the part of both Marcus Lælius and his daughter that she had not asked something for herself.

Alda, much touched at this proof of Susanna's generous friendship, took her hand, kissed it, and bathed it with her tears, the first she had shed since the death of her father: for her disposition was, as we have seen, proud, stern, and intractable, and she had felt a sullen satisfaction in suppressing all outward indications of that intense grief which was consuming her very life.

Susanna's unwearied tenderness had at length succeeded in subduing the haughtiness of that spirit which no violence could ever have moved, like the single drop of water that continually falling won its way, through the resistless influence of persevering softness, into the very bosom of the obdurate marble block, which had resisted the force of iron and steel, combined



with the mightiest efforts of the workman's arm.

The attachment between these young friends was very strong, although it was scarcely possible to imagine a more decided contrast than was presented by their strikingly opposite characters. Susanna was composed, dignified, and full of feminine softness and tenderness; Alda was wild, ardent, and impetuous, and her manners partook largely of the semi-barbarism of her country: she was possessed of strong natural talents, and many noble qualities; but her mind, like a rich neglected soil, though destined for the production of the fairest flowers, had been overrun with weeds for want of proper care and culture.

Susanna, on the contrary, united all the graceful accomplishments and polished manners of an Eastern female of high rank, with great learning, deep reflection, and a benevolence and universal kindness which were founded on principle, and improved by religion.

In person as well as character the same dissimilarity existed. Susanna was rather below the middle height, of a fragile and somewhat bending form, though elegantly proportioned. Her complexion was pale and "darkly delicate." Her features of the true Eastern cast, and her soft black eyes were full of melancholy sweetness whenever she raised them from the ground. Her open expansive brow indicated high talent and inward peace, and its pure whiteness was heightened from the effect of the rich folds of glossy ebon hair, which she wore simply parted from the centre of her head.

Alda, although she had scarcely attained her full height, was already of a tall and commanding figure, rounded with all the plumpness of youth. Her complexion was fair and brilliant, marked with that beautiful blending of the rose and lily for which the aboriginal Britons were so universally admired. Her eyes were blue and sparkling, and her rich profusion of sunny hair fell in luxuriant ringlets down to her waist.

The natural expression of her face was candid, smiling, and animated; but since the period of her captivity it had been clouded with a haughty gloom, and traits of stern sadness and disdainful pride had compressed her fair brow, and curled her youthful lip.

Such was the Judean, such the British maiden, who were so strangely opposed in everything but love for each other; a love which was cemented by their mutual misfortunes, and which became every day more fond and faithful, and possessed the power of making even the chains of a Roman master sit lightly on the fallen princess, whose affection for Susanna was boundless and devoted, and was to the young Judean a precious reward for all the care and kindness she had lavished upon her, from motives of the purest charity and disinterested compassion.

CHAPTER V.

“The proudest heart that ever beat,
Hath been subdued in me;
The wildest will that ever rose,
To scorn thy cause and aid thy foes,
Is quelled, my God, by thee.”

THE long-protracted period of Alda's sickness and tedious convalescence was considered very precious by her and Susanna, because they were permitted the uninterrupted enjoyment of each other's society; and this was a pleasure which neither would have exchanged for all that the imperial city could have offered them, in lieu of those sweetly tranquil hours of holy and affectionate converse.

This time was employed by Susanna in making her friend intimately acquainted with the precepts of the Christian religion, with the solemn

truths of which the young Briton became hourly more impressed; and at length, in the ardour of her newly-kindled faith, she said to Susanna, "I believe: what hindereth me from being received into the church of Christ by baptism?"

"Alda, my dear Alda," said Susanna, taking both her hands and looking impressively in her face; "hitherto I have told you of peace, joy, remission of sins, and everlasting happiness, and all the other blessings which are promised by our Heavenly Lord to the faithful who believe in him, and are willing to become his followers. But it is now necessary to inform you that these blessings are conditional, and not to be purchased without the risk of fearful perils—perils which are incurred in these evil days by every one who confesses the name of the Lord Jesus, and are sufficient to appal every one but a sincere Christian. No one must expect to become a partaker of his glory, who will shrink from drinking of the bitter cup whereof he drank, or from wearing the thorny crown which he wore; neither must

they refuse to follow him to prison and to death, —a death of shame and torture.”

“All this I am both ready and willing to do,” replied the young proselyte, with kindling eyes.

“Ah, Alda ! beware of presumptuous self-sufficiency, for so said the zealous Peter while yet the trial was afar off, in his opinion ; but when it came upon him, remember how he failed.”

“Peter feared tortures, and dreaded death,” returned Alda : “I should not hesitate to face both.”

“So thought Peter, till the moment came which proved the weakness of his unassisted nature, and the folly of his boast. And can you suppose that your new and unproved faith can exceed his, who walked in humble companionship with his incarnate God, who witnessed his miracles, listened to his divine wisdom, and beheld the brightness of his glory revealed on Mount Olivet ? Rely not, therefore, on your own strength, for you know not the test to which you may be called.”

“I can imagine no test from which I should shrink,” replied Alda.

“Come with me,” said Susanna; for at the time when this conversation took place, Alda had advanced so far towards convalescence that she was enabled, with the assistance of her friend’s arm, to take the air occasionally in the balcony on the house-top, and thither she now accompanied her.

It was the evening of a day of peculiar beauty at the close of autumn; an evening of almost summer serenity, when nature appeared lulled in that deep repose in which she sometimes delights to rest, ere the rude storms of winter advance to despoil her of her lingering charms. Everything was profoundly tranquil; there was not a sound abroad, nor a breeze stirring to agitate the faded leaves, that fell unshaken in soft showers from the trees of the imperial gardens, which were contiguous to the house of Marcus Lælius.

Twilight had flung her peaceful shroud over the proud city of the Seven Hills, which with its polished colonnades, stately temples, and streets of palaces, appeared rising, like the fabled Phœ-

nix, in fresh splendour and beauty from the ashes of its funereal flames.

The slender crescent of the new moon was already on the verge of the horizon, and the stars were as yet but faintly indicated in the soft azure of the vault of night, so that all things would have remained in obscurity but for the ghastly irradiation of several luminous bodies that were scattered along the banks of the Tiber, in whose blushing waters their lurid fires were fearfully reflected.

Alda perceived that her companion breathed deep and laboriously, as if oppressed with a heavy weight. She felt the arm on which she leaned become agitated with a convulsive tremor, and anxiously inquired of Susanna if she were ill.

"Not ill," replied Susanna, "but somewhat overcome by the weakness of my mortal nature, which can scarcely endure the contemplation of a spectacle like this, without experiencing a certain shrinking and drawing back from the terrible trial that will most probably await me also in my

turn. But it is past—I have wrestled with my own frailty, through the help of Him whose strength is allsufficient for the support of the feeblest of his creatures who cast themselves upon him for aid; and I trust in humble confidence that his mighty arm will uphold me so that I fail not when the moment cometh. Alda, do you behold those scattered fires?”


“I do,” said Alda, “and was even now about to ask you the meaning of the strange appearance of those luminous bodies, which bear a general resemblance to the outline of the human form, and which (but why I know not) I cannot look upon without a stifling and sickening sensation of horror. What, I pray you, are they?”

“They are Christians clothed in the fiery robes of martyrdom, Alda,” replied Susanna; “and those blue flames which shed a fearful radiance on the night, are feeding on living, breathing forms of flesh like ours, my Alda, and no less keenly sensible to the throb of pain. Yet has this death of burning torture been their choice, in

preference to the alternative of purchasing life at the price of a tacit denial of their Lord, by the performance of a simple act of adoration to the idol gods of Rome, by casting a handful of incense on their altars."

"Their choice would, I trust, have been my choice, for they have chosen gloriously," returned the young Briton, with glistening eyes and glowing cheeks. Susanna clasped her ardent proselyte to her bosom in a transport of holy rejoicing at her answer, for she read its sincerity in that silent language of the heart which emanated in her every look, and spoke even in the eloquent variation of her complexion.

Kneeling side by side beneath the starry canopy of heaven, with their arms fondly entwined together, the young friends offered up their mutual praises to the gracious God who had opened their eyes to the light of truth, and prayed that it would please Him to inspire them with that faith which might enable them to pursue unshrinkingly those fiery paths that had been vic-



toriously trodden by those heroic followers of His, whose purified spirits were even then ascending to his glorious presence, through the incense of the flames which were consuming their mortal bodies.

"Susanna," said Alda, as they returned to the solitude of her chamber, "I am not appalled by the terrible spectacle upon which I have looked. Neither has it operated to shake my wish of being admitted as a member into the visible church of Christ. For like as the hart panteth for the water-brooks, even so is my desire of being washed in the waters of baptism."

"The opportunity of receiving that holy rite, my dear Alda, is at present difficult in this persecuting city of paganism ; but were it attended with every facility it would be of no avail in your case, unless you could resolve to overcome your obstinate pride, so far as to conform to the rules of Marcus Lælius's household by performing your allotted task."

"I will suffer myself to be torn in pieces first,"

interrupted Alda, giving way to all the natural violence of her temper.

Susanna fixed her calm, reproving glance upon her so steadily, that she cast down her eyes in confusion ; though at the same time she observed, in an undertone, "I cannot comprehend wherefore unworthy submission on my part to a Roman tyrant, who can have no lawful title to my obedience, should be named as an indispensable preliminary to my baptism."

Susanna smiling replied, "If it were only as a proof of that meekness which is so lovely to your heavenly Lord, and an act of dutiful compliance with that command in which he enjoins his disciples 'if any man would compel them to go a mile with him, to go twain,' I should say it is both meet and proper for you, as a Christian, to do so. But we will not place it upon these grounds, neither will I attempt to justify the right of Lælia or her father to exact obedience from you. They have no better title to demand it of me, yet you may observe that I submit to

their authority, and perform whatever services they require from me to the best of my ability, without a murmur."

"Your so doing has often been matter of surprise to me," said Alda.

"Not since you have been instructed in the duties of that religion which teacheth us not to resist violence, and enjoins us rather to suffer wrongfully than to excite the angry passions of our oppressors by useless contests," returned Susanna. "Alda, I will explain to you the necessity of your submitting yourself to Lælia, as an indispensable preliminary to your becoming a partaker of the rite of baptism, since, unless you do so, you will never be allowed the liberty of crossing the threshold on any pretence. While, if you abate your haughty and sullen demeanor, and perform, as a matter of course, the duties to which your altered fortunes render you liable, in common with myself and the rest of your fellow-slaves, the restraint which has been laid upon you will be relaxed by degrees, and you

will be permitted in time to go abroad occasionally as my companion, on various errands in the city, on which service I am more generally employed than the other slaves, because Lælia reposes greater confidence in my integrity and judgment, as she knows none of the others scruple to defraud or deceive her on occasion, notwithstanding the severe punishments they incur when they are detected in their malpractices."

"I am not sure that Lælia would ever allow me the opportunity of going abroad, even if I could bring myself to submit to her authority," sobbed Alda.

"You can but make the trial, Alda. Jacob served seven years for a wife, and then did not at first receive her for whom he had toiled; and will you refuse to labour for a few days in the hope of an everlasting reward? Come, cheer thee, Alda, my sister, and faint not in the commencement of thy pilgrimage, for thou wilt have to suffer harder things than this ere thou become a Christian in deed as well as in name."

Alda threw herself into the arms of her friend, wept upon her bosom, and finally promised to concede the point in question.

Yet it was not without many a severe struggle against the unbending haughtiness of her natural disposition that the fallen Princess could condescend to take her place among the slaves of her Roman master, and submit to perform the behests of his imperious daughter.

CHAPTER VI.

"Baskets from Britain brought."—JUVENAL

THE tasks imposed upon Alda were neither difficult nor unpleasant; they consisted of weaving those beautiful little baskets, for the manufacture of which the aboriginal Britons were much celebrated, and which were at that time esteemed so highly at Rome, that one of their satirists mentions them among other articles of costly luxury which he enumerates.

It required all Susanna's persuasive eloquence and oft-repeated admonitions to induce her to receive the materials of which these toys were to be constructed, much more to set about the work of manufacturing them.

It has however been truly observed, that "it is only the first step that costs much." When at length Alda conquered her haughty reluctance so far as to commence making a basket, she experienced no slight degree of self-satisfaction, or what might be termed the "pride of art," as the rest of the slaves forsook their various tasks and occupations, and gathered round her, to watch the progress of her work, clapping their hands and expressing the most unbounded admiration and delight; and when it was completed they appeared to regard it as little less than a prodigy of human skill and ingenuity. But one approving look from Susanna was more to Alda than all this, and taking her arm she moved proudly from the spot, on the approach of Lælia, for the idea of receiving her commendations was more galling to the young princess than any punishment she could have been called upon to endure. Lælia was loud in her praises, for she was infinitely delighted with this specimen of her hitherto unprofitable slave's talents, who had never till this mo-

ment been of the slightest use in the household of Marcus Lælius, save as a subject on which his daughter might constantly vent the unrestrained violence of her temper.

Lælia, however, was no less ready to reward than quick to punish, and calling the reluctant Briton to her, she bestowed many praises on her, for having at length adopted the wise and prudent course of submitting to the performance of her duty, and assured her that past faults and refractory behaviour should be entirely forgotten if she continued to persevere in her present good conduct.

All this was very irksome to the still rebellious spirit of Alda, who knew not how to listen with any degree of patience to the language of superiority in which this humiliating approval was couched, and she could scarcely refrain from assuring Lælia that her present conduct was not dictated by any desire of pleasing her. When Lælia proceeded in further token of her approbation, and as an encouragement for her to con-

time in well-doing, to present her with a handsome garment and a few silver coins,—which proofs of favour were witnessed by her fellow-slaves with undisguised envy and jealousy,—the painfully concealed disdain of the young princess broke forth, and flinging back the proffered gifts of her hated mistress, with a burst of indignant scorn she exclaimed, “Though I have condescended to perform your tasks, proud Roman, I am not yet reduced so low as to accept your presents !” And regardless of the reproving glance of Susanna, she turned away with as lofty an air as if she had been the reigning Queen of the Ieni.

This ebullition of pride was of course productive of many ill consequences to Alda ; it was at a moment too when Lælia, who had not seen her since her long illness, felt some degree of compunction for the barbarity with which she had treated her, when she observed her pallid cheek and wasted form, and all the other ravages which sorrow and sickness had wrought in the once

blooming healthful girl, and had been unusually desirous of acting a conciliating part towards her ; but the contemptuous manner in which the young Briton had repelled her first advance towards kindness had rekindled all her angry feelings, and more than one scene of mutual aggravation took place, disgraceful to both parties, in which Alda as the weaker always became the sufferer ; and it was long, very long before Susanna could prevail upon her young friend to renew her prescribed employments.


When at length she did so, it was in consequence of the increasing influence of religion upon her temper, and she experienced much of inward peace and composure of mind, from ceasing to agitate her angry passions by bitter and unprofitable warfare with one whose authority it was useless to oppose, and whom it was both dangerous and sinful to provoke.

Besides this Alda had now become aware that in many points of her past conduct she had herself too nearly resembled Lælia. Religion, that

great purifier of the heart, had taught her to strip away the false colouring and deceitful gloss in which self-love and the strong delusion of vanity had taught her to disguise her former actions, and she perceived that she also had been imperious, unreasonable, unkind, and disregardful of the feelings of those who were in any way constrained to bear her tyranny. She too had in the short-lived day of her greatness abused her little measure of power.

She remembered with regret many an act of petty oppression of which she had been guilty, and thought it very possible that had any of her slaves been placed under the yoke of Lælia they would have been scarcely the worse for the exchange, and she acknowledged that it was with even-handed justice the bitter cup of slavery had been returned to her own lips.

These reflections rendered her very sad, but did more towards subduing the violence of her temper than anything beside. Susanna encouraged her in her dejection by the assurance



that such sorrow was profitable to her, and would lead to peace and joy, since no one could become fully sensible of all their evil traits without the deepest anguish and humiliation, but that knowledge was precious because it was the first step towards sincere amendment of heart.

Alda at length obtained the reward for which she had so resolutely striven, for Lælia voluntarily offered one day, when she had produced an uncommonly admired specimen of her national manufacture, to grant her and Susanna a holiday, to witness, if they felt so disposed, the chariot-races and games of the circus, never for one moment supposing it possible that they could dream of availing themselves of this temporary boon of liberty for any other purpose than that of visiting this general centre of attraction.

Thither thronged all that was gay, noble, beautiful, and magnificent in Rome ; and luckless indeed did the most abject of the plebeian orders consider themselves unless they had a chance of

being present to witness the novel spectacle of the mighty Cæsar, the man who ruled with despotic sway over the masters of the world, enacting the characters of a minstrel, a stage-player, and a buffoon.

It was a pageant, however, that possessed no attractions for the young Christian friends, who with some little difficulty succeeded in extricating themselves from the mixed multitude that was hurrying onwards towards the scene of action, from every street and avenue of the imperial city. Every one was hastening thither, save helpless infancy, decrepid age, and bedridden sickness, and that happier few on whom the light had shined, which had led them from the broad paths of perdition through thorny but glorious ways, to everlasting bliss. These⁴ it is scarcely necessary to explain were the members of the persecuted Christian Church at Rome, who were joyfully availing themselves of the opportunity which the conflux of high and low to one spot of public resort afforded them of assembling

themselves together for the purpose of offering up their united praise and prayer, and celebrating the rites of their holy religion.

These, when the giddy, thoughtless crowd had passed away, might be seen singly, or in little family groups, traversing the deserted streets in an opposite direction from the way which led to that resort of sin and folly the circus.

Susanna and Alda followed their steps at a modest distance, through many obscure turnings and windings, which appeared to the wondering Briton an inexplicable labyrinth of houses, till they reached a desolate quarter of the city, not yet cleared from the ruins of the half-burnt buildings, unfrequented by any, unless indeed by the unhappy beings whom the late fire had rendered houseless wanderers, and who might there seek a shelter.

At length they stopped before a large lonely house with closed windows, which bore no traces of being inhabited ; but on a certain signal from Susanna, the door was slowly and cautiously

opened by a veteran Roman soldier, who having exchanged a brief greeting with her, admitted them into the interior of the dwelling, and conducted them into a spacious, dilapidated room of state, once the banqueting hall of one of the favourite ministers of the Emperor Augustus.

These now desolate walls had witnessed "the feast of reason and the flow of soul," the triumph of literature, the boast of oratory, the charms of music, and the powers of song, when the royal Augustus had deigned to grace the festive board of his friend, and, seated between the master-poets of the age, Virgil and Horace, enjoyed a prouder distinction than he conferred, while all that was admirable in learning, art, science, genius, and wit assembled round their graceful patron.

The noble owner of the mansion had perished in one of the bloody proscriptions of the gloomy tyrant Tiberius, whose hatred had been incurred by the friendship shown to him by his royal predecessor, and the respect he persisted in testi-

fyng for his no less royal victim the granddaughter of Augustus, the virtuous and unfortunate Agrippina. His house had since that time remained uninhabited, and had fallen into decay. The costly furniture and ornaments had been plundered, the paintings stripped from the walls, and the statues broken and defaced, and every vestige had disappeared that might have denoted that the imperial master of the world had been wont to grace it with his presence.

Yet in the days of its desolation, that hall was destined to a nobler use, even that of a temple to the living God, where he was worshipped in spirit and in truth by that good company of saints, and noble army of martyrs, who had for His sake renounced that world which was not worthy of them.


Here in secrecy they assembled themselves together, to offer up to Him that unadulterated, unfeigned incense of the heart which is more pleasing in His sight than whole burnt offerings. The snares of temptation had assailed them, but

they had resisted their power; persecution had been tried upon them, and they had remained unmoved by its terrors, and fresh converts were daily added to their numbers.

In the armies, in the fleets, even in the household of the barbarous Emperor Nero, the author of the unexampled and remorseless persecutions with which the Christians were pursued, were zealous proselytes to that faith.*

A rude altar of unhewn stone, inscribed with the name of the living God, occupied the place where once the seat of state, destined for the revels of an earthly prince, stood; and the vaulted roof of the spacious dome echoed with diviner sounds than the lofty strains of Virgil, the glowing numbers of Horace, and the soft voluptuous Ovid, for it resounded with the sweet songs of Zion, the seraphic melody of Christian hymns, and the voice of fervent prayer and adoration, that car-

* "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of the household of Cæsar." (Philippians, iv. 22.) Pomponia Græcina, the wife of Plautius, and Claudia Rufina were supposed to be of these saints.



ried the hearts with which it burned on the rapt wings of faith and holy love, beyond the narrow confines of their earthly sphere, into the presence of the Most High.


The marble fountain in the centre of the hall, which had formerly flowed with perfumed waters, and ministered to the purposes of costly luxury, by shedding a delicious coolness through the festive apartments, and sprinkling the guests with its fragrant showers as they reclined on their purple couches after the banquet, now devoted to a nobler and better purpose, sparkled with the pure element, in which the converts to the Christian faith were baptized. Thither Susanna now led her young proselyte, and informed the holy man who acted as priest, of her desire of being admitted into the church of Christ through that sacrament.

The venerable man fixed his eyes upon the young Briton with an attentive yet mild scrutiny for a moment, and said, "Are you aware, my daughter, of the peril you are incurring to yourself

by becoming a member of this persecuted church? for however desirous we are of increasing its numbers, we will admit no one hastily and unadvisedly, lest when the hour of temptation and cruel persecution come upon them, they dishonour their Lord by falling away from him."

"Father," replied Alda, "I came not hither lightly or ignorantly. I have been in time past an evil doer, and a follower of false gods, whom I blindly served. The true light has now been happily revealed to me. I earnestly desire to cast the heavy burden of my sins, my errors, and my follies at the foot of the cross, that I may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of an everlasting life. I am ready not only to be washed from the dark stains of my past life in the waters of baptism, but even if it should be so required, in my heart's dearest blood.

"These eyes have witnessed the sufferings which the Christian martyrs have preferred to a continuance of life, purchased at the price of apostasy, and I am willing to follow their glorious example,



for I esteem a heavenly inheritance as cheaply purchased by a death of torture."

"Happy art thou, my daughter, and blessed mayest thou be in thy faith," replied the priest; "for thou art like unto the wise merchantman in the parable, who when he had heard of the pearl of great price, sold all that he had and purchased it."

He then administered the holy rite of baptism to the young Briton, in which two noble Roman ladies, a centurion, and a Parthian slave were united also, who were all clothed in the white robes of neophytes, and immediately after the ceremony was ended, the devout little assembly joined in singing the following hymn.

BAPTISMAL HYMN.

Break forth into singing, O earth! and rejoice;
Attend, O ye heavens, and give ear to our voice;
For the souls that long wandered in darkness and night,
Have turned from their errors and gazed on the light.

The heathen, the heathen, who knew not the Lord,
Have entered his temple, and bowed and adored;

And there's joy in the presence of Angels this day,
That their prayers have been heard, and their sins washed
away.

The hour is approaching, yea shortly will come,
That shall witness the fall of the idols of Rome ;
When thy courts shall no longer in secret be trod,
But all tongues shall proclaim thy salvation, O God !

It was with feelings of awe and reverence that no tongue can describe, that Alda united for the first time in an act of public worship, and listened with rapt devotion and holy attention to the words of inspiration, and the divine truths conveyed in that portion of the Scriptures which was read to the pious assembly followed by a discourse in which these truths were commented upon and explained, and the sacred precepts of the Christian faith solemnly enforced to the newly-baptized converts.

Then the sacrament of the Lord's supper was administered, and the service concluded with an anthem of praise ; after which the members of the little flock exchanged a solemn farewell with each other, as was their wont, for they always

parted with the idea that some among them might be called upon to seal the profession of their faith with their blood before the congregation should be gathered together again. Several of their number had fallen victims to the sword or torch of persecution since they had last assembled in this place of worship, and the priest in the close of his address to his flock, had touchingly commented upon that circumstance, and pointing to the vacant places so recently occupied by their martyred brethren, strenuously recommended their example to the newly-received members of the church, and prayed that they, himself, and all present might be gifted with faith and fortitude sufficient to follow the bright and heavenward paths which they had taken.

These Susanna told Alda when they separated from the rest of the congregation, on their homeward way, were those martyred Christians, the fires of whose sacrifice she had shown her from the balcony of the house of Marcus Lælius.

The young friends arrived at home a full hour

before the return of the family from the circus, which was passed by them in sweetly serious converse on the solemn business of the day. Their tranquil enjoyment was speedily disturbed when the giddy concourse began to retrace their way from the tumultuous scene of mental intoxication to which the mass of the Roman population had resorted at an early hour in the morning.

Strange indeed did their boisterous and riotous manners appear to the fellow-captives, in contrast with the calm and holy demeanor of the Christian assemblage they had just quitted, so that they could scarcely refrain from asking themselves if they were indeed beings of the same species with those who were employing the allotted days of their earthly pilgrimage in the service of God. They shuddered as they reflected upon the awful certainty that each of those licentious and unhappy creatures was possessed of an imperishable and, alas! responsible principle of immortality, which they were madly involving in everlasting ruin.

It was from the balcony of the house of Marcus Lælius that the young friends beheld the return of the clamorous crowds from the circus, and it was with mingled regret, indignation, and pity that they heard their invocations to their heathen gods and goddesses, whose images were carried on beds before the chariot of the Emperor, to whom also the Romans scrupled not to address the language of profane adoration, which he as impiously dared to accept, though conscious in his own heart that he was a wretch polluted with the murders of a wife, a mother, a brother, and a thousand other crimes too odious to record. Nor was it the least horrible of his atrocious deeds that he had instituted a remorseless persecution against the innocent Christians, under the base pretext of punishing them as the authors of the late conflagration of Rome—his own profligate act—with the view of turning upon them the indignation of the ruined thousands whom that fire had rendered homeless and destitute.

It was to no purpose that he devoted those

guiltless victims to the fiery tortures which the bloody laws of Rome decreed to incendiaries; every one was aware who was the real criminal, the imperial monster, who, as Suetonius records, "attired himself in his theatrical robes, and seated himself on the tower of Macænas' house to enjoy the spectacle of the conflagration, while he sung to his harp the burning of Troy;" and afterwards lent his own gardens to the citizens of Rome, that they might have the greater convenience of beholding the sufferings due to his own crimes, which he there remorselessly caused to be inflicted upon the Christians. And these mean and degraded Romans could become pleased spectators of the tortures inflicted upon his innocent victims, while they addressed the language of flattery, and offered divine honours to the man whom they all knew to be the guilty perpetrator of the deed.

CHAPTER VII.

“There is a world above
Where parting is unknown ;
A whole eternity of love,
Formed for the good alone ;
And faith beholds the dying here,
Translated to that happier sphere.”

MONTGOMERY.

THE immediate season that followed the baptism of the young Briton was the most tranquil she had ever known in her life. She ceased to dispute the commands of Lælia, and performed her allotted tasks with quiet dignity, while to her fellow-slaves she conducted herself not perhaps with the benevolent courtesy which marked the manners of Susanna to every one, but with a degree of calm magnanimity, neither courting their regard nor repelling their advances. Susanna and she were equally resolute in refusing

to enter into any of their plans for deceiving or defrauding their mistress, or to take any part in the intrigues, or parties into which the household of Marcus Lælius was divided and subdivided ; • on the contrary they did their best to promote peace and harmony among the dissentients.

Their opportunities for attending the places of Christian worship at Rome were few. Whenever they were afforded they embraced them joyfully, and were thankful for the blessing vouchsafed them, and earnestly endeavoured to improve it to their eternal welfare.

Rome still reeked with the blood of their Christian brethren, and every time they visited the place of assembly they missed a part of the little flock, who had fallen victims to the insatiable cruelty of the inhuman emperor, and his licentious courtiers, who hated the Christians for their very virtues, and could not forgive them for the striking contrast which the purity and moral excellence of their conduct afforded, to the shameless sensuality of their own lives.

Susanna bade Alda hold herself prepared for that awful moment when they too might be called upon to endure such a test of the sincerity and strength of their faith as might make the boldest tremble in its anticipation.

"I trust I shall not shrink from a fiery test of mine," returned the enthusiastic Alda, with a flushing cheek and kindling eyes.

"I pray that my spirit may be inwardly strengthened against the frailty of my mortal nature," said Susanna, who of a more delicately organized frame, and a softer temperament than the young Briton, felt less confidence in her own unassisted powers of endurance, but was cheered by a conviction that if assailed by sharp tortures, the strength to support them would be derived from a higher source than her own feeble corporeal powers could supply.

Had such a trial been laid upon her, she would have sustained it as firmly, if not as fearlessly, as the most heroic of the Christian martyrs; but her faith required no such test

of its sincerity. Her warfare had been otherwise accomplished, and the price of her high calling was about to be secured, for her pure and heavenward spirit had received a gentler summons to enter into the joy of her Lord.

The sure yet silent progress of decay had already commenced, and was rapidly advancing, unnoticed at first even by herself, as its only visible tokens were increasing languor and debility, a short low cough, and a general attenuation of her already fragile and bending form, while the unwonted yet fitful colour that flushed her sunken cheek, and the brilliancy of her large dark eyes, deceived every one around her into the supposition that a beneficial change had taken place in her very weakly constitution.

Alda, inexperienced in any kind of sickness, especially those languishing disorders which are too frequent among delicate females whose constitutions have been enervated by sedentary employments and the indulgences usual in civilized nations, then perfectly unknown to the robust and

active women of her own country, was the first to congratulate Susanna on this alteration in her appearance.

“Know you not, my dear Alda, that the bloom that now tinges my cheek is but the bright and flattering livery of death?” replied Susanna, calmly.

But Alda was obstinate in refusing to credit the assertion. Such an idea as the death of Susanna, in the first flower of her youth, had never entered her thoughts. “It was a calamity too great to befall her in addition to her past misfortunes,” she said, “and she would not believe that it could happen; not at least while her cheek wore that colour, and her eye shone with that lustre.”

Susanna told her that every hour was now conducting her rapidly to the grave. Alda refused to listen to her. Had she seen her friend stretched on the bed of pain, pale, helpless, and uttering sighs and complaints, she would have been awakened to her danger; but Susanna suffered little;

she withered imperceptibly, like an evanescent flower that fades and dies before the storms of autumn approach to ruffle its delicate leaves.

She uttered neither sighs nor complaints, but continued to occupy herself in her daily tasks, and in works of usefulness and benevolence to the last hour of her existence.

One night, however, it happened that she was unusually restless and feverish, and affected with a difficulty of respiration, and towards the break of day she said to Alda, "There is something in the air of this room that is oppressive to me. I think I should feel refreshed if I could breathe the cool morning breeze in the balcony on the house-top."

Alda judged so too, and as soon as it was light they rose, and proceeded thither. It was a morning of uncommon beauty, and Susanna at first appeared much revived, but after a few turns she complained of faintness, and Alda led her to one of the seats with which the balcony was furnished.

"Not there, my friend," said Susanna, "not there; place me with my face to the east."

"That you may look upon the rising sun?" said Alda. "See, the stars are disappearing, and his beams are already reflected above the edge of the horizon."

"That I may look towards the land of my fathers once more—towards Jerusalem, that once favoured but now devoted city, whose remembrance cleaves to my heart, and troubles the hour of my departure," returned Susanna, with deep emotion. "For oh!" she continued, smiting her bosom, "her days are numbered, and the hour of her desolation is at hand. The glory of Israel is departed, and the word of prophecy is about to be fulfilled, which says, her children shall be outcasts and wanderers in all lands. O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! can my tears avail thee aught, when thy Heavenly King has wept over thee in vain? Yet guilty as thou art, it is well pleasing to me to know that these eyes will not behold the evil that is about to come upon thee."

For near as is the time of thy fall, yet it shall not happen in this my day. And though the cry of my people shall be heard in all lands, by reason of their misery, it will not pierce the cold ear of death."

Here the young Judean paused, overcome with the bitter prospect of her country's approaching ruin, and extending her arms towards the east, she raised her swimming eyes to heaven, her lips moved silently, as if in supplication for her unhappy people, and her face was covered with tears.

Alda, who could not behold her sorrow without being also afflicted, drew her fondly to her bosom, and kissed them from her pale cheek. Susanna tenderly returned her caresses. After a pause Alda said, "I have sometimes heard you allude to your country before, but this is the first time you have mentioned it by name."

Susanna sighed as she replied, "There are some griefs that are eloquent, like yours, my Alda, for the name of Britain is ever upon your lips: it seems a relief to your passionate sorrow

to make all things acquainted with your fond regrets. Mine was of a nature not to be vented in words; it was a painful but treasured source of woe. When the name of my guilty but still dear country has been pronounced in my hearing, I have started as if a knell were in mine ear, and an arrow in my heart. In the still watches of the night I have waked to think upon her, and to weep; and I have risen while the dawn was yet grey and indistinct, that I might behold the sun at his first rising, and think that his glorious beams already smiled brightly on the plains of Judea, were reflected in the waters of Jordan, and gilded the pinnacles of the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem."

Alda took Susanna's wasted hand, and fondly pressing it to her lips said, "You have then left ties of kindred in your own city, whose remembrance adds a tender sorrow to your regrets."

Susanna shook her head mournfully as she replied, while the tears fell fast from her eyes, "Alda, my sister, listen to me, for I will with-


hold nothing from thee in this hour, perhaps our last of uninterrupted intercourse, for my time here is now short ; I am passing away like a shadow from the face of a dial, and shall soon be gone.

“ My father was a wealthy and learned man, one of the chief of the princely tribe of Judah, and I was his only child, tenderly beloved, and precious in his sight, for my mother, who was the object of his fondest affections, died in giving me birth.

“ I was delicately bred and carefully instructed in music, embroidery, and all the other accomplishments usual among the daughters of Jerusalem, and in all of these I was considered to excel. As I advanced towards womanhood, my father, whose dearest companion I was, took pleasure in directing my attention to the higher branches of study, in which he delighted, and under his tuition I acquired a knowledge of many of the oriental languages, and a general acquaintance with the learning of the East.

The study of the Scriptures was one of our chief pleasures, though as yet we read them blindly, for our eyes were not open to perceive how marvellously the word of prophecy had been fulfilled in our own days.

One evening, when we were dwelling at our summer-house at the foot of Mount Lebanon, it happened that my father and I were sitting in our open porch fronting the road that leads to Jerusalem. I was reading to him, as I was wont to do, a passage from the sacred roll. Now the portion that I had chosen for that day was the fifty-second chapter of the prophet Isaiah. While I was reading, a wayfaring man whose face was turned from Jerusalem, halted in front of the porch, and leaned on his staff to listen, and my father, according to the hospitality of our nation, invited him to enter and be seated. The stranger bowed his head in acknowledgment of the courtesy, but remained standing, though he joined himself to our company, and motioned for me to continue reading.



“When I had concluded the chapter he laid his hand upon my shoulder, and said, ‘Damsel, understandest thou of whom those words are written?’

“I looked at my father that he should speak for me, for I was young and feared to answer the stranger, whose manner though mild was awful, and my father replied to him, ‘Art thou an Israelite, and knowest not that these words apply to the promised Messias, that consolation of Israel for the appearance of which we wait?’

“‘Wait ye for him yet?’ rejoined the stranger in a tone of surprise. ‘How understand ye then the four last verses of the ninth chapter of the book of the prophet Daniel?’

“My father took the roll from my hand and read the passage attentively, and the stranger obliged him to confess that according to that calculation the time must be already past. He then particularly directed our attention to these words, ‘And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself.’

“Then turning back to the book of the prophet Isaiah, he read aloud the fifty-third chapter, beginning, ‘Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?’

“My father became pale as he listened, for he was a truly devout and godly man, in whose heart the love of truth was superior to all prejudice; and taking the roll once more from the hands of the stranger, he with a faltering voice read the twelfth and thirteenth verses of the eleventh chapter of the Book of Zechariah: ‘...So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.’

“‘Of whom is this written?’ said my father. The eyes of the stranger kindled as he replied, ‘Of him whom the children of Israel did value when they gave thirty pieces of silver unto the traitor who betrayed him into their hands. The same who when he repented of betraying innocent

blood, took the thirty pieces of silver and cast them down in the temple before the priest, and went out and hanged himself. And the chief priests took counsel together and said, It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood ; and they bought with them the potter's field to bury strangers in.'

"My father smote his hands together, and looked upon the stranger in doubt and perplexity, when the latter continued, 'Saith not the same prophet, And they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son? And again, Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts : smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' And as he continued to point out the passages in the Prophets and the Psalms, that referred to our Lord's advent upon earth, and commented upon the wonderful fulfilment of even the minutest of the circumstances in the crucifixion of the blessed Jesus, as foretold by the

prophets, my father could not forbear crying out, like the Roman centurion, 'Truly this was the son of God!' and rending his garments he exclaimed, 'Woe unto us, for we knew not the time of our visitation!'

"Then said the stranger, 'Believe thou that He whom your people have crucified with wicked hands was the expected Messiah, the everlasting Son of God.'


"'The book—the book hath convinced me, and convicted me of sin in my former unbelief,' said my father, laying his hand upon the roll.

"'That book also contains thy pardon for thy past fault,' returned the stranger, 'if thou wilt be baptized with the baptism of the remission of sins in the name of the Lord Jesus.'

"I was trembling with strong emotion, for my conviction had preceded my father's, though I had hitherto kept silent; and when my father rose to accompany the holy man to the clear streamlet of running water that flowed before the dwelling, I cast aside my veil and followed them,

exclaiming, 'What hindereth me from being also made partaker of this great salvation?' and my father and myself were baptized the same hour. My father was no lukewarm, trembling proselyte; his conviction of the truth of Christianity was strong and ardent, and he hastened to proclaim it in the ears of all men. He was warned by his friends of the imminent peril he would incur to himself by this proceeding, for the Jews were animated by the most deadly and murderous spirit of hatred against all who confessed the name of Jesus. He would not listen to counsels which he considered base and cowardly; but continuing to testify his belief, and the reasons thereof, and to stand forth boldly to confute his unbelieving countrymen, he in a short time fell a victim to their fury; for finding themselves unable to silence his eloquence or to reply to his reasoning, they rose up tumultuously and stoned him to death.

" You have been a daughter, Alda, therefore you may imagine what were my feelings on this dread-




ful occasion. I will not dwell upon my grief; it was deep, bitter, and enduring: but at that moment I was scarcely conscious of its full intensity, for it came upon me like a stunning blow that seemed to paralyze every sense beneath its withering influence.

“At the time of my father’s martyrdom I was about to be given in marriage to Azor, the only son of my uncle, to whom I had been betrothed from my childhood. We were fondly attached to each other; but my cruel uncle on my father’s death, understanding that I also was a Christian, broke off the contract, lest I should convert his son to that persecuted faith; and not contented with unjustly seizing the whole of my large inheritance, he sold me as a slave to the brother of Marcus Lælius, who was about to return to Rome with the veteran legion under his command, and by him I was conducted to Rome, and given to his niece Lælia for a slave, and in this house I have dwelt as a bondwoman ever since, being now a period of upwards of four years.”

"Alas!" said Alda, "your lot has, I confess, been far harder than mine."

"Inasmuch as the fortune of war and the wrongs of enemies are easier to bear than the injuries of those whom Providence designed for our friends and natural protectors," rejoined Susanna. "But to proceed:—the remembrance of my father, my country, and my dear Azor weighed heavily upon my heart; and added to these, the restraints of slavery were strange to me, who had been brought up, as it were, in the very lap of indulgence, and had scarcely known an ungratified wish till after I became an orphan. Still I knew these misfortunes and sorrows were not caused by those to whom I had become subject, therefore it would have been foolish and unjust to conduct myself with intemperate anger and sullenness towards them. On the contrary, I endeavoured to behave in that way which I considered would be well-pleasing in the sight of my Heavenly Father, with meekness and resignation, and submitted to their authority in all things that were not sinful.




“ When it was observed that I was patient, trustworthy, and possessed of much useful knowledge, and appeared resigned to my lot, I was treated with kindness and confidence, and allowed a greater share of liberty than my fellow-captives.

“ I did not declare my religion, but I should not have hesitated doing so, had I considered it would have been of the slightest service to the cause of Christianity. I was not required to join in any of the rites of pagan worship, for the Romans did not appear to consider the religious opinions of their slaves of the least importance : at least in the house of Marcus Lælius every one has hitherto been left, as you have seen, to follow his or her national superstition unquestioned and unchecked ; and I am sorry to say that I have failed to make any impression upon any of them, in regard to the important truths of Christianity, with the single exception of a young Greek slave, who is since dead.

“ On my first entrance into this idolatrous city,

I was shocked beyond measure at the thousand abominations and gross superstitions that fell even under my observation, confined as were my opportunities of witnessing the evil doings of its inhabitants, all of whom appeared sitting in the darkness of spiritual death. At that time I knew not that the Christian church was secretly established, and rapidly gaining ground at Rome, for the converts were obliged to act with great caution; so that I, as an obscure individual, a stranger, and a slave, knew not of the existence of a single member of the faith, and supposed myself the only one in Rome, till on narrowly observing the pure and holy manners of a noble matron, called Pomponia Græcina, and contrasting her behaviour and conversation with the licentious and bold bearing of the other Roman ladies who frequented the house, I felt a secret conviction that she also was a Christian. There was a sublime and moral beauty in all her sentiments, and her subjects of discourse were such only as were becoming to the lips of one with whom a knowledge



of the truth abode. When she spoke of virtue, of self-denial, charity, benevolence, and forgiveness of injuries, I could not be mistaken ; and more than once I recognized the very words of Scripture, which seemed to escape her lips, as it were, from the overflowings of her heart. I was then certain that she was a Christian, and though I was only present in the capacity of a slave, I could not resist raising my eyes occasionally to hers, with a look that informed her there was one at least present whose heart was as her heart was, and who possessed a knowledge of the only true God ; for judging her feelings by my own, I thought she would, in this idolatrous city, consider communion of sentiment on such a subject precious, if only with a slave. Nor was I mistaken, for she took me aside one day, and said to me, ‘ You are one of the faith, maiden.’


“ I joyfully confessed that I was. She demanded how I became so, and I briefly related my story. The noble lady shed tears, and embracing me with the tender affection of a mo-

ther, she said, 'I will, if it be possible, procure your freedom of Lælia, and you shall be to me as a daughter, for I am a Christian.'

"Oh! Alda, how my heart leaped within me at these words, and how did a thousand vain, vain hopes spring up and flourish for a few brief, but delightful moments as she spoke! These hopes were not all of heaven, and they died the death of all earthly ones, for I thought, alas, I had never ceased to think, of Azor.

"The generous Pomponia applied to Lælia for my freedom, offering to pay any price she might choose to name for my ransom. Lælia did not wish to part with me; money was to her no object, and I was very conducive to her comforts; yet I believe she would have yielded to Pomponia's entreaties and my tears, had not her father entered at an unlucky moment, and forbidden her to part with a slave presented to her by her uncle.

"The truth was, he disliked Pomponia, and was willing to do her a displeasure that she might abstain from visiting his daughter; for the purity



and gravity of her manners were considered as a great restraint by his licentious guests.

“ Pomponia consoled me as well as she could for this bitter disappointment, and came more frequently to the house than ever on my account, and sometimes prevailed on Lælia to allow me to attend her at hers, in order to instruct her little granddaughter in embroidery. And thus did I obtain an opportunity of attending the secret assemblies of the Christians at Rome, which had formerly taken place at her own house, till very serious charges were preferred against her, accusing her of attempting to introduce a strange and foreign superstition into Rome. The matter was referred to the jurisdiction of her husband, who, in conformity with the ancient usage in such cases, was obliged to call together a number of her relatives, and in their presence to sit in judgment upon her. Though out of affection to her he pronounced the charges to be unfounded, he thought proper to oblige her to observe greater caution in future, and practise her religion in secret.


“ You may remember, Alda, having frequently observed a noble Roman matron, who invariably saluted me after the religious service of the church was ended at the meetings of the Christians.”

“ Who was distinguished no less by the mild dignity of her appearance than by the deep mourning of her dress,” said Alda.

“ Which mourning she has always worn since the death of her beloved friend Julia, the daughter of Drusus, who was brought to a tragical end through the wicked arts of Messalina, the first wife of the late Emperor Claudius,” resumed Susanna. “ Many years have passed since that sad event, but she has never thrown aside her weeds of woe, and will never cease to lament her friend to the end of her life.”

“ As I should lament you, were I so unhappy as to be deprived of you,” said Alda, fondly embracing Susanna.


“ No, Alda, not thus should a Christian sorrow for the death of a Christian. Pomponia’s chief cause of regret for the loss of her friend is that



she was cut off while in ignorance of that which maketh wise unto eternal life, and died as she had lived, an idolatress. Ah! Alda, how much more consoling are our hopes in parting, than if you had persisted in adhering to the superstition of the Druids, which must have rendered our approaching separation an eternal one!"

"Talk not of a separation at all between us," returned Alda, bursting into tears, and clinging to her friend.

"Thinkest thou not that it is painful to me also?" replied Susanna: "but I have learned to submit myself in all things unto the will of my Heavenly Father. But you have not yet heard the sequel of my story, and I will not hide anything from thee. One day it happened that Lælia had sent me on several errands, in the performance of which I had to traverse different parts of Rome, and in crossing the Field of Mars I was accosted by a beggar, who seized my garment as I passed, and extended his hand for charity, with a wild and eager importunity that



almost alarmed me. His whole dress and appearance betokened such wretched and abject misery that I immediately paused to afford him my little offering of relief, for I had just received a gift in money from Lælia; and I never refused such little testimonies of kindness from her, because it afforded me the means of ministering to my distressed fellow-creatures. But ere I could tender my mite, he exclaimed in my own language, 'Give me to buy food, or I perish!' The voice went to my heart—I looked in his face—it was my uncle; HE who sold me into captivity. The recognition was mutual—he uttered a wild shriek when our eyes met, and crying out, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' he would have fled, but his strength failed, and he fell prostrate at my feet."

"Well, Susanna, in what terms of reproach did you address him?"

"Ah, Alda, I thought not of reproach when I saw him in his misery. I raised him up,



and only uttered one word, for I could articulate no other—it was ‘Azor!’”


“He dashed himself upon the ground with a cry of agony at that name, and heaped the earth upon his head, rending his hair and beard with all the violence of despair.

“My head swam giddily : I stood pale and trembling and sickening with horror, striving but in vain to gasp forth a single inquiry as to the cause of his anguish ; I could only articulate ‘Azor, Azor!’

“My wretched uncle turned his glaring, blood-shot eyes upon my face, and straining my garments in his convulsed grasp, he exclaimed in a hoarse, broken voice, ‘Why ask you the living of the dead? I had a son, but he is gone. I robbed you of your inheritance to increase his wealth, and behold a curse hath followed it, and it is added to the spoil of my enemies:

“‘I sold you into captivity that you might not endanger his safety, by converting him to the belief of the Nazarenes ; but he became one of

them in spite of my precautions, and the Jews rose up and stoned him to death, even as they did your father ; and when I flew to the spot to take up his mangled remains, they mocked me in my misery, and withstood me, and said, ‘ Art thou also one of them ? ’ I reproached them with what they had done, and told them of the curses that were written against them for all the righteous blood they had shed in the city, and they accused me to the Romans as a seditious person, and a foe to Cæsar : they seized upon my wealth, cast me into prison, and finally brought me hither to answer to the Emperor Nero. But he saw that I was only a wretched bereaved father, delirious with guilt and misery, and commanded me to be set free ; yet took no thought nor care for my subsistence or return to Jerusalem ; and I have wandered up and down this idolatrous city of the Gentiles, homeless, destitute, and starving for many days ; living upon the alms of slaves, despised, and scorned by all men, yea even by the very abject, and hiding my head at night



in half-burnt houses, among the blackness of ashes, seeking rest and finding none, for the hand of the Lord is against me.'

"I have since wondered, Alda, that I could listen to a tale like this so calmly as I did. But I was supported in that moment of unutterable anguish by a mightier power than my own. Besides, I thought not of myself at that dreadful moment; I thought only of the wretched, wretched man before me. His past crimes were forgotten by me; I remembered only that he was the brother of my father, and the father of Azor. I saw only his present misery. I tried to speak comfort to him, and to tell him that there was pardon even for him, through repentance and faith in the crucified Redeemer of men, who died for the atonement of the sins of all men; but he would not listen to me. I do not think he was sensible of all I said, for he fled from me with terrible cries, in spite of all my efforts to detain him, and I never saw him again, never could learn what became of him. The light of reason had evidently departed from him, and I

fear he perished miserably. For myself, Alda, I at first sorrowed as one without hope ; but the Almighty hath since removed the cloud from my mind, and taught me to rejoice for Azor, not to weep that he had been persuaded of the truth, and instead of continuing in this transitory state of existence, a few brief years in sin and unbelief, had been deemed worthy of receiving a martyr's crown, and had entered the gates of life before me. And now hath He of his infinite mercy shortened the days of my earthly pilgrimage, that I might be the sooner united to him in everlasting happiness, where I shall be abundantly comforted for all the sorrows that have been laid upon me in this fleeting life, which passeth away like a watch in the night, and is brought to an end like a tale that is told."

There was something inexpressibly solemn in Susanna's tone as she concluded, and when she had finished speaking she folded Alda to her bosom, and kissed her several times with great affection. Then changing her manner she said,



“The morning is far spent, the birds are singing in the imperial gardens, and the busy population of the great city are stirring and abroad. The cares, the toils, the restless schemes, the joys, the sorrows, and, alas! the crimes of the day are already begun. Up, Alda, we must proceed to the performance of our prescribed tasks, for we are not free (fortunately perhaps for us) to choose our own occupations, because the disposal of our allotted time is at present in the hands of another.”

The young friends then proceeded to offer up their morning sacrifice of praise and prayer to the Almighty Lord and Giver of all good gifts. They had scarcely completed their devotion, when Narsa came with a face of wrath to chide them for lingering together in the balcony, instead of joining their fellow-slaves in the lower apartments.

Alda would have made an angry rejoinder, but Susanna, with her wonted mildness, said; “I pray your patience with us, Narsa. I have rested ill last night, and we have not heeded the lapse of


- time. Thou shalt not have cause to complain of our want of punctuality again."

This answer left Narsa no excuse for further chiding. They were about to proceed to their tasks together, when she told Alda that her lady was going to spend that day and the following at her villa at Tusculum, and it was her pleasure that she should attend her.

"You do not mean that I am to be separated from my friend?" demanded Alda, throwing her arms round the faded form of Susanna.

"I tell you, slave, that you are named by the noble lady Lælia, your master's daughter, as one of the bondwomen who are to have the honour of accompanying her on her journey to Tusculum," returned Narsa. "She does not consider the Jewish damsel well enough to go, otherwise she would much prefer her attendance to yours, I promise you."

"Then Lælia may fix her choice upon some other of those who are bound to obey her, for I will not go to Tusculum," said Alda resolutely.



"Not go to Tusculum, barbarian! not attend the noble Lælia!" exclaimed Narsa, in mingled surprise and anger. "I should like to know your reasons for daring to refuse obedience to the will of your master's daughter;—not that your refusal is of the slightest moment, for you must go, and that you know full well."

"Do you think I will ever consent to leave Susanna at a time when she stands in need of all my care and tenderness, to follow a Roman whom the unjust caprice of fortune has made my mistress?" rejoined Alda, giving way to her former fierce spirit.

"Alda, dearest Alda, what language is this?" said Susanna, in a tone of expostulation.

"Consent forsooth!" retorted Narsa; "as if the consent of a slave were of any consequence, when the absolute will of those who possess the power of life and death over her has been made known."

The eyes of the young Briton flashed fire; she darted a glance of the most withering scorn upon

Narsa, but the angry rejoinder that rose to her lips was checked by the persuasive looks of her sick friend, who, much agitated by the anticipation of a scene of frightful violence, drew Alda aside, and entreated her to comply with Lælia's commands with so much earnestness that Alda, though strongly tempted to persevere in her resistance, and to continue the useless war of words with Narsa, at length conceded the point by saying, "I go, Susanna, since you have requested it, for to you I can refuse nothing. But oh! if you knew what it costs me to leave you at this time!" she added, with a look full of sorrow, for the danger of Susanna, never before perceived by her, now she was about to leave her broke suddenly upon her, and rendered even an hour's separation from her dreadful, much more an absence of two whole days.

Susanna soothed, cheered, and encouraged her; yet when the litter was announced to be in readiness that was to convey Lælia to Tusculum, and Alda was summoned to attend her lady, she

flung herself weeping into the arms of her friend and declared she could not leave her.

“Go, go, my dearest Alda,” said Susanna: “why will you thus distress me? Your duty as a Christian requires that you should not provoke useless anger in those who could have no authority over you unless it were permitted them.”

“Oh, but to leave you, Susanna! to leave you thus!” sobbed Alda, as she contemplated with anguish and alarm the sunken features, and now death-pale cheek and shadow-like form of her friend.

“Will you then, Alda, grieve me by refusing my last request?”

“Your last, Susanna!” reiterated Alda, with increasing alarm.

“Nay look not thus, dearest Alda,” resumed Susanna in a more cheerful tone; “we shall meet again, I humbly trust, therefore let us not part as if we were about to part for ever.”

Alda offered no further objection: the friends exchanged a long and fond embrace in silence, for their hearts were too full for words.

A second summons from Lælia arrived, and Susanna putting the weeping Briton gently from her, whispered, "Go, Alda, now, if you love me, without another moment's delay."

"Farewell, then, Susanna."

"Farewell, beloved Alda," responded Susanna ; "a long farewell, perchance ; but Thy will be done, O Heavenly Father," she softly murmured, as her tearful eye pursued the retreating form of Alda, as with slow steps, and casting many "a longing, lingering look behind," she departed, and reluctantly took her place in the litter with Lælia and her favourite freed-woman.

Lælia was out of temper at the delay, and thought proper to reprove her sharply for not obeying her first summons. At another moment Alda would possibly have made an angry rejoinder, but her haughty spirit was subdued by the sad and solemn parting with Susanna, and she burst into a flood of tears.

Lælia was affected by the sight of unwonted sorrow in one so proud and stern, and secretly re-


proached herself for her harshness, for there were times when this spoiled child of prosperity was capable of soft and even tender feelings, and nothing but the influence of her besetting sins, pride and self-love, prevented her from acknowledging to Alda that she felt compunction for having afflicted her, and for all the hard usage she had received at her hands.

After a long pause however she spoke to the young Briton in a kind and soothing voice, and made some trifling observation. To the sorrowful Briton the day was overclouded, and the sunshine had become gloomy, since her separation from Susanna, and instead of replying to Lælia, she sobbed aloud in the bitterness of her heart. Lælia, who totally mistook the cause of her trouble, supposed she wept on account of having displeased her, and bade her be comforted, for she was not angry with her now.

Alda's eyes flashed through her streaming tears as she replied, "Thinkest thou that thy chiding hath power to make me weep, or that the daugh-

ter of Prince Aldogern careth whether thou art pleased or angry? It would be well for me if I had no other cause of sorrow than thy caprices."

Lælia was of course highly provoked with this language, and Alda felt the ill effects of having rashly and uselessly incensed the naturally faulty temper of one who was, unfortunately for others, and still more unhappily for herself, in possession of that perilous attribute, despotic power, over a portion of her fellow-creatures. Fatal possession! how few of those who are invested with it know how to resist the temptation of abusing it in the moment of provocation! for we behold our own foibles with such indulgent eyes, and the slightest offences of others against ourselves through so exaggerated a medium, that the best and wisest of us can never become impartial arbitrators in our own cause.



CHAPTER VIII.


“ From the bright cloud above me
The lark scatters song ;
But I listen for thy voice,
How long ! oh how long !
How long and how vainly !
The night and the morn
But leave as they found me,
A mourner forlorn.
Light comes to the summer,
And rain to the tree ;
But never, oh never,
Comes comfort to me.”—JEWSBURY.

ALDA had been a prisoner within the walls of a city during the whole period of her captivity to Marcus Lælius, and though the friendship of her beloved Susanna had of late lightened the weight of bonds, otherwise intolerable to the free-born denizen of a land where the restraints and sedentary habits imposed upon females in a civilized state of society were unknown, yet she severely felt her confinement.

Alda, who had been wont to follow the chase with her father, brothers, and young companions, and to range with them uncontrolled over dale and down, in all the wild vivacity of health and unbroken spirits, had drooped and withered in the close confinement to which she had been doomed for so many months.

Her eye grew weary of the splendour that surrounded her, and was tired of reposing for ever on pompous buildings, marble colonnades, colossal statues, artificial fountains, and formal gardens. The noisy bustle of the great city annoyed her, the continual passing and repassing of crowds in which she saw no familiar face, was wearying to her, and the sight of flowers in vases, and the songs of caged birds filled her with melancholy.

The prisoned child of nature sighed for the sparkling of the stream, the waving of the green-wood, and the sight of hill and dale in all their wild variety. At any other time and under any other circumstances, the journey to *Tusculum*, and the privilege of spending two long



bright spring days in the country, surrounded with verdant fields and embowered with the shade of groves just bursting into their first tender luxuriance of foliage, would have been hailed by her with delight ; but now she turned away from all this with a gloomy and dissatisfied spirit. She had indeed left the noise and tumult of the hated city far behind, and her ear was saluted with the murmuring of mountain-streams, the hum of the wild bee, and the song of a thousand birds ; and her eye, instead of meeting the eternal sameness of white dazzling marble, reposed on delicious verdure, in all its bright variety of tints, as she sat amidst the shades of Tusculum ; but her eyes were dimmed with tears, and she joyed not in the joy with which all things around her, whether animate or inanimate, hailed the birth of spring.

Fields, woods, and waters were around her, and the bold range of the Abruzzi mountains lay before her ; but she averted her tearful eyes from the rich features of the landscape to fix

them on the remote towers of Rome, whither her anxious thoughts had flown back, for there her treasure was, and there was her heart also. Everything beside was valueless in her sight. It was indeed with the utmost difficulty that she could resist the temptation she felt of escaping from the observation of Lælia, and returning back to Rome to rejoin her beloved friend ; she was only restrained from making the attempt by the conviction that her so doing would give the greatest uneasiness to Susanna, and incur her mild but serious reproofs.

Lælia was restless and irritable : she was out of humour with herself, and of course every one around her felt the ill effects of it in one way or other ; but it was impossible for anything to augment the impatience of Alda, for that had reached its climax before they had spent six hours at Tusculum, and she thought if she could but return to Rome, she should not care if she never beheld the country again, forgetful that while there she had pined like an imprisoned

eagle, for Nature's wildest solitudes. So inconsistent are human beings in their wishes, and so little does happiness depend on mere localities, for the spot that we detest to-day may be the centre of attraction to us to-morrow, and possess a charm of interest more powerful than that which was hallowed by our earliest attachments.

Late in the evening of the second day, Alda returned to Rome with her lady. The homeward journey had appeared to her interminable, and in the unspeakable fever of impatience that preyed upon her, she had returned brief and reckless answers to every observation Lælia addressed to her. She was conscious that she was wrong in so doing, but could not resolve to control her temper, which, in her present excited state of painful anxiety, was ruffled at everything; and more than once the reflection pressed upon her mind, "I blame Lælia, and accuse her of unreasonable conduct, and unprovoked bursts of anger. Alas! I only resemble her too closely in her faults."

When the litter stopped at the Lælii palace, and the long train of obsequious slaves, attendants, and freed men and women came forth to receive their young lady, Alda's anxious eye sent an eager glance among them to search for Susanna, but in vain; she was not among the group who stood with lighted torches beneath the portico. Scarcely could Alda refrain from springing out of the litter before her lady had descended, which she did with great pomp and stateliness; but when Alda found that Pamphylia, the favourite freed woman, was also about to take precedence of her in alighting, and was aware that the ceremonial of her descent would be ten times more elaborate than that of her lady,—for Pamphylia was slow and solemn in all her movements, in order to inspire the rest of the household with due notions of her consequence,—her impatience could brook no further delay, but, pressing before her, she leaped from the litter; and, rushing impetuously through the crowd of slaves and attendants, she had entered

the palace before the astonished Pamphylia could recover from her surprise at what she called the unprecedented ill manners of the young barbarian. "Although it was no more," she said, "than what might be expected from a savage Briton."

Alda, meantime, when she found not her whom she had flown on the wings of fond affection to greet, after her brief but agonizing absence from her, and received no answer from her fellow-slaves in reply to her eager inquiries for Susanna, hastened to seek her in the lonely upper chamber devoted to their mutual use.

"Susanna, beloved Susanna! behold I am returned!" she cried, as she approached the door of the apartment with hurried steps. "Susanna, art thou here?" she continued in a faltering voice, on receiving no answer to her animated exclamation; and, with a trembling anticipation of she knew not what, she opened the door, and cast an anxious glance round the dilapidated, solitary apartment. But perceiving that Susanna was lying upon the bed, she supposed she slept; and,

unable to resist the desire she felt of contemplating that beloved countenance, she approached her, but very softly, lest the sound of her steps should disturb her slumbers. Vain caution ! those slumbers were too deep and calm for mortal tread to awaken. The flood of silvery moonbeams shining through the unclosed lattice shed a pale cold light on the paler colder brow of Susanna, and revealed the expression of ineffable peace that rested there ; and the angelic smile that lingered on her lips told, with silent eloquence, that to her there was joy in death.

Alda gazed upon the motionless form and tranquil features of the deceased in an agony to which no words could do justice, and the distraction of heart that was reflected in her face afforded a striking contrast to the placid repose and solemn sweetness which the hand of death had impressed on every lineament of her whom she lamented.

This was a blow so dreadful, so overwhelming, that Alda, wholly unprepared as she was to en-

counter its weight, sank beneath the suddenness of the shock, and swooned with the intensity of her grief. Her emotions had been so violent that nature required a temporary suspension of feeling to enable her to support the agony of mind which returned with reviving consciousness.


The period of Alda's insensibility was protracted for hours beyond the usual duration of a swoon; from which she awoke not till the bright beams of the rising sun shone warm upon her face, and the fresh breeze of morning blowing in through the open lattice lifted the long fair ringlets that were scattered in wild negligence on her bosom, and on the floor on which she lay in helpless inanity.

Her first sensation of consciousness recalled to her sad heart the remembrance of the loss she had sustained, and she started from the ground to embrace the cold, cold form of her departed friend, and gaze once more on those beloved features. That melancholy consolation was denied to her grief; for the dead body had been

removed during her swoon, and Alda beheld Susanna no more.

Since the dreadful day when her venerable father had expired in her arms in a Roman dungeon, leaving her to orphan loneliness and slavery in a land of foes and strangers, she had known no sorrow like this. The wildness of her grief absolutely terrified those about her with its frantic violence. She reflected not that Susanna was removed from earthly cares and sorrows, from slavery and exile, to that blessed state where grief is unknown, and where all tears are wiped away from the eyes of the just made perfect, and she mourned for her as one without hope.

Every day that passed over her increased her affliction, because she became daily more and more conscious of the heaviness of her loss, and that she had no one now to offer her comfort. She acknowledged not the hand of the Lord in the calamity that had fallen upon her. She murmured against his justice and his wisdom,




and would not perceive that He had removed her earthly idol from her, in order to lead her engrossed affections to himself, her Father and her God. She well knew that her departed friend would have been the first to condemn her want of resignation, and fruitless rebellion against the will of her Creator ; but she would not bow herself in submission to the Almighty hand that chastened her. Meanwhile to those around her her behaviour was sullen, fierce, and desperate.

Some allowance was at first made for the state of her feelings, as her attachment to the deceased was so well known ; but when it was found that she persisted in an obstinate rejection of all her tasks day after day, regardless of either persuasions or threats, those who were placed in authority over her had once more recourse to violent measures. These had indeed the effect of rousing her from the gloomy abandonment of despair into which she had been plunged by the death of her lost friend ; but it was only to create a fierce excitement of temper, during which she addressed

provoking language to Lælia, who commanded her to be severely punished.

If Alda had not been withheld by those around her, she would have returned the blows she received from Narsa on her tyrannical mistress ; but at length, exhausted by her bootless fury, she relapsed once more into a state of fixed and motionless despair, in which she long remained, apparently insensible of everything around her. But though her eyes were closed and tearless, and her lips were silent, her mind was actively employed.

A thought had struck her, a new and sudden thought, which recalled the flush of hope to her faded cheek : she had conceived the idea of effecting her escape from bondage. While Susanna lived, a tie more firm than links of iron had bound her to a lot of slavery, which was shared with her ; and for her sake the proud Alda would have submitted to become a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, or to be the tenant of a dungeon from which the light of day was for ever




excluded. That tie was severed. And, driven to desperation by the recollection of her wrongs and her woes, she resolved to submit to her injuries no longer.

Intent solely on carrying into effect the design she had formed of instant flight, she now affected a calmness she was far from feeling, and effectually beguiled the suspicions of her tyrants, by drying her tears and resuming her long-neglected tasks in silence, on which she employed herself sedulously till the arrival of the hour of rest. She was then permitted to retire to her solitary apartment. Without undressing, she threw herself upon the mattress, and listened attentively till the profound silence testified that the whole household were buried in sleep. She then arose, and quitting the lonely chamber with noiseless steps, she succeeded, under the cover of darkness, in effecting her escape from the palace of the Lælii.

CHAPTER IX.

“And here forlorn and lost I tread,
With fainting steps and slow,
And wilds immeasurably spread,
Seem lengthening as I go.”—GOLDSMITH.

WITH a beating heart the young fugitive traversed the deserted streets of that magnificent city which was at that time the arbitress of the known world. That mighty emporium of glory and of guilt, of greatness and of meanness, was lulled in repose. The slave enjoyed a brief interval from his labours, the wicket ceased from troubling for a season, and the weary were at rest. The busy cares, the restless tumults, and the agitating scenes of day were suspended. All was silent, save the baying of the watch-dogs, the occasional tinkling of the bells carried by the præfects of the watch, the




distant bursts of inebriate mirth from the imperial palace, and the soft sighing of the wind among the trees of the public gardens.

Even in that hour of inquietude and alarm, the young Briton was struck with the contrast between the splendour of Rome,—with its marble porticos and columned arcades, statues, temples, and fountains,—and the rude wood-built, straw-thatched huts of which the straggling, narrow, and irregular streets of the metropolis of her native country were composed. But she turned with stern contempt from the luxury and magnificence of the imperial city, when she reflected upon the odious crimes that were daily and nightly practised in these abodes of grandeur and of misery, and only thought that Rome, while she sat as a queen among the nations, was more truly abject and dishonoured than the most fallen of those on whose necks she had placed her haughty foot in triumph.

Alda lingered not among the stately new-built streets, where wealth and greatness had

already fixed their residence, but directed her steps to that quarter of the city which was still in a state of ruin and desolation from the ravages of the fire ; and from thence she, without any difficulty, found an unguarded outlet into the country, thus avoiding the danger of being questioned, and perhaps stopped by the guards, had she attempted to pass through the gates. That obstacle to her escape being now happily evaded, she drew a freer breath, and hurried onward, pausing not till she found herself in the vicinity of a crowded burying-ground without the bounds of the city ; and there she hesitated, and casting a melancholy glance on the long line of tombs on which the calm moonbeams shone so softly and peacefully, she thought it would have afforded her a sad satisfaction to have visited the graves of her father and her friend, ere she quitted the precincts of Rome for ever. Vain wish ! the mournful remembrance pressed upon her heart that the place of their burial was unknown to her.



They slept not with the proud and mighty dead of Rome. Though both were nobly and one royally born, they had been buried with the burial of slaves ; and smiting her breast in anguish, as she reflected that even the poor consolation of weeping over the spot of their earthly rest was denied her, she proceeded forward on her unknown way.


Whither she was going she knew not, and scarcely cared, so that she escaped from the hard yoke of Roman bondage. Young, active, and vigorous as she was both in mind and body, accustomed to hardships, fatigues, and dangers, and regardless of them all, she pursued her course with the same sagacity, courage, and celerity that a North American Indian exerts when travelling in a country with which he is unacquainted.

Rome was soon left far behind ; and having refreshed herself with a draught of the waters of the Tiber, she resolved on crossing that river, whose course she had hitherto followed ; and taking off her sandals she forded it with naked

feet at a place where the yellow sands sparkled like a bed of gold through the shallow stream in the first rays of morning.

When she had gained the opposite shore, and turning about beheld faintly the far-off domes of the City of the Seven Hills, she clasped her hands together and exclaimed, "I am again a Briton, for I am free!" And kneeling on the dewy sod, she performed her morning devotions, returning fervent thanks to God for having permitted her to break from the chains of her oppressors, and then pursued her journey with renewed courage and spirits.

Every place was to her alike strange and unknown, but having paused to consider the face of the country, she shaped her course towards the blue line of the Abruzzi mountains, where she judged she should find shelter and concealment, relying for the means of sustenance on that bounteous Providence whose beneficence is extended to all, and she trusted that He who feedeth the young ravens when they call upon him, would



not suffer her to perish of hunger in the wilderness.

All day she journeyed onwards, without deviating from her course to seek for refreshments ; but notwithstanding all her exertions evening surprised her, while yet distant from a place of refuge. Having from a high eminence that overlooked the plains observed a party of Roman soldiers on the road to Tusculum, at sunset, she plunged into a thick wood to avoid them, in case she should chance to be the object of their pursuit, which, without considering her own want of importance, she imagined was the case. But when that alarm had subsided she began to experience, in spite of her energetic determination, some degree of bodily fatigue and faintness from having travelled so many miles without food ; and as the deepening shades of night gathered round, she repented of having quitted the open country to entangle herself among the mazes of the forest, and would have esteemed herself most fortunate could she have obtained the shelter of the meanest

hut or the wildest cave in which to pass the night, for she thought it more than probable that these gloomy shades might be the haunt of robbers, and infested by savage beasts. The latter supposition was fearfully confirmed by the dismal howling of the wolves from the mountain solitudes.

Utter darkness closed round, while Alda was yet uncertain which way to turn her steps ; and for the first time her courage failed her. Overpowered with hunger and weariness, and impeded by the tangled underwood and briers, that overspread her devious path and sorely wounded her feet, or startled her by fastening upon her garments, she paused in doubt and terror, and lifted up her voice in prayer—not to the spirits of the wood and the hill, the fabled deities of her native land, to whom some strange remnant of the superstition of her early days tempted her to call for aid in this fearful hour, but to Him who is strong to save, and a present help to those who rely upon his protection.

Almost before her supplication was concluded she espied a glimmering of light through the branches at some little distance. Without doubt or hesitation the weary fugitive followed the friendly beam, forcing her way with renewed energy through the thorny brakes that impeded her progress, and at length discovered that it proceeded from the interior of a cave at the foot of a hill.

The sounds of mirth and revelry, mixed with occasional bursts of song from within, now reached the ear of Alda. She turned hastily about to retrace her steps; but when she heard the wild howling of the wolves, mingled with the piteous cries of the feebler animals they were pursuing in the wood and on the plains, she paused in terror, and at length resolved to throw herself upon the protection of the tenants of the cave. She advanced a few steps, but stopped in dismay when she perceived a company of armed men, of ruffianly appearance, clad in the skins of wild beasts, sitting round a rude oak table, on

which was displayed a banquet of various kinds of provisions, wine, and dried fruits.

The blazing branches of fir that were fixed in chasms of the cavern to serve the purpose of torches, threw a red glare on the fierce countenances of the robbers, for such Alda doubted not they were ; and as she cast a terrified glance upon their savage forms and lineaments, she repented of having ventured so far, and would have fled, but it was too late. They had already perceived her, and with a frightful exclamation started up and surrounded her. One of the most brutal-looking seized her arm, and demanded her business in a tone that thrilled her with terror, and for a moment deprived her of the power of utterance ; while the others, struck with surprise and admiration at her youth, her beauty, and the simple yet noble dignity of her air and mien, regarded her with looks that were no less alarming to her than the savage rudeness of him in whose grasp she found herself.

“Have pity upon me!” she cried. “I am a

stranger, an orphan, and a slave ; I have fled from my cruel mistress to this forest, and being affrighted at the howling of the wolves, I was induced to take refuge in your cave ; if I have committed a trespass in so doing, I pray your pardon."

"If you have spoken the truth, damsel," returned the robber, who continued to detain her by the arm, "we will show you favour ; and as you are young and fair to look upon, I think I will take you to wife, for I have long been in need of a spouse to cook for me, make my garments, and perform a hundred other little services which I am weary of doing for myself."

"Hold, hold, Lupus !" cried several of his comrades ; "you can have no right to appropriate this prize to yourself : there be others among us who wish for wives as well as you."

"I will slay her with my own right hand ere I resign her to another," retorted the ferocious Lupus.

"It were better, indeed, that the damsel should

be slain than prove the cause of a brawl among us," said one of the robbers, unsheathing his poniard with an air of stern determination. Alda uttered a piercing cry, and exclaimed in her native tongue, "Father of mercy, send thy servant help in this dreadful hour!"

The next moment a man in the decline of life, but of a majestic stature and appearance, advanced from an inner apartment of the cavern, and demanded the cause of the disturbance. Alda perceived at a glance, from the respectful manner in which the robbers gave way on his approach, that he was their chief, and breaking from the hold of Lupus, threw herself at his feet, and implored his protection.

"Of what country are you, maiden?" demanded he, "for you speak in an accent that falls sweetly upon mine ear, and recalls the memory of my native land."

"You are a Briton," rejoined Alda, with a cry of joy, "for I also recognize the voice of my own country among the sons of the stranger."

“And what makes you so far from the green Isle of the West?” said the robber chief, gazing upon the fair face of Alda, with a look of anxious scrutiny.

The tears filled her eyes as she replied, “When the Roman general Paulinus overthrew the armies of the Queen of the Iceni, I shared in the ruin of my country, and was, together with my valiant father Aldogern, made captive and carried to Rome.”

“Child of mine ancient friend and honoured leader!” exclaimed the robber chief; “may I indeed believe that I look once more upon the princely Alda, who when an infant I have so often borne in these arms? Hast thou, my child, forgotten Mainos, the next in command to thy brave father, in that disastrous battle?”

“Not now I look upon those once familiar features calmly,” returned Alda. “Forgive me, that I was slow to recognize you at first, and tell me by what strange destiny we have both

been conducted to this spot, so far from our native Britain."

"You cannot have forgotten, noble Alda, that I was a sharer in the captivity of your brave father, and doomed, like him and yourself, to form a part of the insulting pageant of our foes."

"Alas!" said Alda, "my bitter anguish on account of my father's sufferings and death was to me as a gulf in which all other sad and fond remembrances were swallowed up. But what was your destiny after you were separated from us?"

"A lot of slavery," replied Mainos; "but my free spirit could not brook the Roman thrall. I broke from their chains, and fled to these woods and wilds, where it has been my good fortune to become the chief of a band of brave but outlawed men, the natives of various lands, united in hatred to Rome, although we reckon more than one proscribed Roman among our numbers."

"And has the friend and follower of my noble



father become a captain of robbers?" said Alda, in a tone of deep regret.

"Princess, what else remained for me?" returned her countryman. "My heart was bound to my own green land, but how could I return thither without ships? I am not as an eagle, that can spread the wings of his might to the winds, and sail through the pathless fields of air whithersoever it lists him. I was cut off from Britain for ever, and I found a country and a people among the mountains of Italy; and the despised captive Mainos, whom Rome made a show and a gazing-stock for her gaping mechanics and insolent patricians withal, has made his name a terror to her boldest, since the day that he became the leader of the free bands of these mountains."

Alda would have replied, but Mainos told her she required food and repose, and obliged her to partake of the plenteous repast with which the board was covered. After she had refreshed herself sufficiently, he caused the most kindly female among the robbers' wives to be summoned,

to whose care he commended his young countrywoman for the night. By her Alda was conducted into an inner apartment of the cavern, where she found a comfortable bed prepared of soft dry moss, on which she slept sweetly till the morning.

CHAPTER X.

"The church may wander in the wild,
But God still feeds his pilgrim child."

MRS. WEST.

WHEN Alda rejoined her countryman the next day, she found him very desirous of being made acquainted with the history of her captivity, and the particulars of her escape, to all of which he listened with the deepest interest. More than once the fierce Briton grasped his spear, and muttered threats of vengeance against Marcus Lælius and his daughter, when she related the wrongs she had received at their hands. But when she went on to speak of the tender friendship she had experienced from her generous fellow-slave, her loved and lost Susanna, and related in simple and

touching language the death of that fond and faithful friend, and her own bitter affliction and cheerless loneliness after that event, the hardy chief shamed not to mingle his tears with hers, which flowed afresh at that mournful but sweet remembrance.

Nor was this sympathy confined to Mainos alone, for the outlawed band gathered round in mute attention, and listened to her tale with breathless interest, expressing by their looks and gestures, rage, sorrow, pity, and indignation, according to the various feelings which her narration called forth ; and when it was concluded, they offered her their rough but hearty congratulations on her escape, and united with their leader in assuring her that she should enjoy a secure asylum among them.

But Alda, though grateful for their kindness, felt that a robber's hold was not a fit abode for her ; and after thanking them for their sympathy and good-will, she told Mainos that it was her wish to retire to some peaceful and solitary re-

treat among the mountains, where she might remain secure from the pursuit of Marcus Lælius and the intrusion of unsuitable visitors, and pass her time in the exercises of devotion, and the contemplation of the beauties of nature.

Mainos comprehended very little of these feelings, but he told her if such were her desire, he would presently cause a cottage to be erected in a sweet spot, where she should enjoy perfect leisure and retirement, and occupy herself as she thought proper. "Although," added he, "it would be much more pleasing to me if you could be content to remain amongst us, where every wish of your heart should be gratified as soon as made known, and you might be a queen if you would."

"A queen!" replied Alda. "Alas! my friend, the day has been when my presumptuous heart would have fluttered at the word. I have now become aware of the woe and vanity of greatness, and the highest distinction to which I now aspire is the name of a Christian."

It was a name that Mainos had never before heard, but he concluded from the tone of reverence in which it was pronounced by Alda, that it was a title esteemed more honourable than that of queen, and immediately replied, "Whatever be the mark at which thy ambition points, O Alda! know that it will be the pride and pleasure of Mainos to further thy wishes in all things." Strange indeed did it appear to the potent chief that his young countrywoman could actually bound those wishes to the possession of a cottage in a mountain-glen, provided with a garden and a stream, a flock of six ewes, and as many goats, for this was all she requested of him, who could have endowed her with gifts which the wife of Cæsar might have envied.

Intent, however, on gratifying even what he deemed her caprices, Mainos pleasantly occupied himself for some days in superintending the erection of her sylvan abode, which was constructed by his followers, according to his directions, of the boughs of trees woven closely together with

pliant twigs, plastered over with clay, thatched with the bark of trees, and covered with moss.

This shieling formed a light and commodious outward apartment to a small natural grotto in the rocky side of the mountain, the entrance of which was artfully concealed by a closely-fitting door, which could scarcely be detected by those who were not acquainted with the existence of the recess within.

When the dwelling was completed, furnished, and stocked with all things needful for comfort and convenience, Mainos conducted his young countrywoman, with no slight degree of pride, to the lovely sequestered spot in which it was situated, and bade her take possession of her future home. Alda was charmed with the profound and beautiful solitude of the pastoral valley in which her abode was placed, and pointing to her little flock, she said, "Am I not now a queen?"

"A queen, noble Alda!" responded her countryman with surprise.

"Aye," returned she, smiling, and seating herself upon a thymy hillock. "Here is my throne, yonder is my palace, and here are my happy and innocent subjects," she added, directing his attention once more to the snowy little flock, which were cropping the green herbage on the margin of the flowery rill, in whose transparent waters their peaceful forms were mirrored.

"This were to make every shepherd a king," said Mainos.

"True, if they would but behold a shepherd's destiny in the same light in which it appears to me at this moment," returned Alda.

"A shepherd's life may possess charms for those who can be contented with an obscure and inglorious destiny of ease and security," said Mainos; "but it requires territory, riches, power, grandeur, and sovereign authority to constitute a monarch, and what shepherd was ever possessed of these?"

"It would be no difficult matter to prove myself the possessor of all that you have named,"

returned Alda with a playful smile. "For territories, will not the wide range of these sublime, and almost untrodden solitudes, the woodlands, the mountain, and the vale, be mine to range unquestioned and unrestrained? For riches, shall I not receive of that which neither wealth nor power could purchase, even the blessings of peace, holy joy and tranquillity, and that hope of a heavenly inheritance, of which no invader can rob me? For power, do I not enjoy that of freedom, of the blessings of which no one but an emancipated slave can form an adequate idea? And as for sovereign authority, the Emperor of Rome himself could not boast of more absolute sway than I shall hold over these gentle and unresisting subjects of mine; to whom I shall trust to add many more, by dispensing my little bounties to the pretty choristers who are even now singing so sweetly from the branches that overhang my pleasant abode. So shall I, escaping all the cares and sorrows of royalty, enjoy all the happiness of reigning."

Mainos shook his head incredulously.

“Ah, Mainos,” continued his young countrywoman, “once I thought differently, and would have scoffed at all of that which I have now learned to prize. The false medium through which I was from infancy accustomed to view these things has been removed, and a better light has been vouchsafed to me, so that I may truly say, ‘it was good for me to have been afflicted.’”

There were few days in which Mainos did not visit his young countrywoman in her pleasant valley. She was to him as a treasured object, upon whom the kindly affections of his heart were in secret lavished, even as a father's love is given to an only beloved daughter, for in that light did the valiant British exile behold the child of his departed friend and countryman.

There was one subject on which it was Alda's chief delight to dwell when they met:—it was a subject of the deepest interest to both, though at first Mainos only listened to it because

she earnestly requested him so to do, and he could not refuse anything which she desired.

It was on the great business of his eternal weal that Alda was so intensely anxious to win his attention ; and the task was difficult to conquer the strong superstitions and deeply-rooted prejudices of her countryman ; but by slow and almost imperceptible degrees she gained ground with him, and the impression once made was daily strengthened, nor was the time distant which saw the fierce chief forsake the habits and erring belief of his early life for the pure faith and precepts of Christianity.


Alda enjoyed a season of unruffled tranquillity in her solitary home in the mountain-glen, and passed her time in the cultivation of her little garden, the tendance of her flock, and the constant exercises of devotion. One day it happened that one of her ewes had strayed from the pastoral valley in which they fed, and Alda wandered to some considerable distance from her home in search of the truant ; and climbing first one

eminence and then another, she insensibly proceeded much further than it was her intention to do, and at length she found herself bewildered among the wild passes of the mountains. The sun was still bright in the heavens, though fast veering towards the west. Alda, who had been accustomed from childhood to an uncultivated and thinly-inhabited country, was by no means uneasy at this circumstance; but as she was somewhat fatigued with the rough and steep paths she had traversed for some miles, she seated herself on a rocky crag to rest awhile before she prepared to descend.

From this station she cast her eyes on the surrounding country, which lay in all the beauty of Italian landscape at her feet. The woods just bursting into leaf, wore that rich and tender green which is as evanescent as it is lovely: some of the trees had already put forth their white or blushing buds, and the streams were descending from their mountain-sources in sparkling showers or flashing torrents to the plains. Yet Alda

dwelt not on the charms with which nature had enriched the prospect before her, for her eyes had discovered the imperial City of the Seven Hills in the distance, and her thoughts were already busy with the retrospect of her captivity there. Dark as those days had been, their remembrance was now so brightly gilded with the sweet yet mournful recollection of the friendship of Susanna, that she felt, if the choice were now hers, she would cheerfully have exchanged the blessings and privileges of freedom to enjoy once more the delights of companionship with her even in slavery and woe.

Her eyes overflowed with tears as she dwelt on the fond remembrance of her friend. She pictured to herself the happiness they might have enjoyed had they been permitted to dwell together in her peaceful cottage in the mountain-glen, and sighed with bitter regret as she reflected this could never be. Then she reproached herself for the selfishness of her repinings, and exclaimed, "Why do I mourn ~~thee~~, ~~Susanna~~, and sinfully



desire to recall thee to a world which was not worthy of thee? Friend of my heart, forgive the fond yearnings of thy Alda's spirit towards thee! That spirit, alas! cleaves to the dust instead of aspiring heavenward on the wings of hope and faith, to seek thee in the mansions of celestial bliss."

While the words were yet upon the lips of Alda, a soft strain of sacred melody floated round her, ascending, as it seemed to her, from among the rocky caverns at her feet, and a chorus of sweet voices sang the following requiem.

REQUIEM.

Blest are the dead in the Lord who repose,
For their labours are ended, they rest from their woes :
Yea, saith the Spirit, they rest from their strife,
They have 'scaped from the cares and temptations of life.

Their days of probation and sorrow are done ;
Their warfare is o'er, and their battle is won.
Through the portals of death they in triumph have trod ;
And have entered their joy in the presence of God.

Alda listened in a sort of ecstasy, till the pealing notes died away, for it seemed to her as if the

beatified spirit of her departed friend had addressed her from another world, in a strain of holy rejoicing on her blessed change from mortality to immortality. While she was still absorbed in admiration and wonder, the heavenly symphony was again wafted to her ear. Starting from her seat, she followed the choral sound, which she found proceeded from a defile between two hills, midway up the mountain, somewhat below the eminence she had gained ; and guided by the seraphic harmony she presently reached the spot, where a company of Christian converts were assembled for the purpose of joining in the worship of their glorified Redeemer.

They were engaged in singing a hymn, that appeared to have been composed for the purpose of their present assembly.

HYMN.

Far from the haunts of guilty men,
Almighty God, thy people flee,
And in the lonely mountain-glen
Lift up their hearts to thee.

Here in this solitude profound
To thee, O Lord, our voice we raise,
Till forests, rocks, and caves resound
With notes of prayer and praise.

For thou art still our high reward,
Whate'er our earthly woes may be;
Nor can we deem that lot as hard
Which leads to Heaven and Thee.

The holy strains ceased, and a momentary
silence prevailed: the pause only served to lend a
more powerful effect to the full and triumphant
notes of the Benedicite with which they closed
the choral part of the service.

BENEDICITE HYMN.

Oh praise the Lord, ye woods and vales;
Praise him, ye rocks and mighty streams;
Praise him, ye showers and pleasant gales;
Praise him, ye clouds and glorious beams.

Praise him, ye tall and stately trees;
Praise him, ye herbs and blushing flowers;
Oh praise the Lord, ye rolling seas,
And praise him all ye circling hours.

Oh praise the Lord, ye stars and moon,
And thou refulgent orb of light;
Praise him, O morning, eve, and noon;
Praise him, thou dark and silent night.

Oh praise the Lord, ye sons of earth,
In mortal toils who weep and groan ;
And praise him, ye of heavenly birth,
Who stand around his throne.

And oh let those to whom 't is given
To hear his everlasting word,
Unite with all in earth and heaven
To bless and glorify the Lord.

It was scarcely necessary for Alda to explain that she was a member of the persecuted but increasing church of Christ, for her looks were radiant with the fervent rejoicing of a true believer, and she joined in the devotions of the little flock with an enthusiastic fervour that was evidently the offspring of a sincere piety.

Some of the Christians assembled in this rocky glen were pilgrims from all parts of Italy and Greece. The venerable priest and a part of the congregation were residents on the spot, having retired from the world for the sake of enjoying the exercise of their religion undisturbed. They formed a little colony among the fastnesses of the mountains, where they had hitherto dwelt securely

concealed from the persecuting Romans, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

This was the Sabbath night, and they continued in prayer till the dawn of the next morning. Alda remained with them, and thought no more of her strayed ewe.

The following day the young Briton returned to her own abode, though pressingly intreated by the Christian colony to take up her residence among their community ; but there was to her a peaceful charm in the profound solitude of her own valley that she could not resolve to exchange for the pleasures of social life. Many, however, and sweet were the opportunities of religious intercourse which she enjoyed with these secluded Christians of the mountains ; and every succeeding Sabbath saw her added to the pious congregation who there assembled for the purposes of prayer and thanksgiving.

CHAPTER XI.

“... What are these
So withered and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o’ the earth,
And yet are on it?”—SHAKSPEARE.

ONE evening as Alda was sitting on a rustic bench in front of her dwelling, contemplating with an admiring eye the tranquil glories of the setting sun, she was surprised by the unwonted sight of two strangers advancing towards her. Even in the distance she could perceive that they were weary and dejected. The elder of the two moved with faint and feeble steps, and leaned heavily on his companion, a young and delicately-formed female, who appeared perfectly unequal to the task of supporting his sinking form.

Alda's heart had been softened by her own

sufferings, and amended by the divine spirit of that religion which inculcates universal charity and goodwill to all mankind.

The sight of the forlorn travellers filled her with emotions of compassion for their evident distress, and she rose up to meet them, and offer them the hospitalities of her humble roof.

As she approached the woe-worn and weary pair, she observed they were meanly habited, but the slanting beams of the setting sun shone too dazlingly in her face to permit of her distinguishing their features till she was almost near enough to salute them. Ere she could do this the young female uttered a piercing shriek, and striking her hands together in dismay, exclaimed, "We are lost, my father!" and the old man sank upon the ground with a deep groan.


Alda sprang forward to offer her assistance, but started back on recognizing the features of Marcus Lælius and his daughter.

At the sight of these, her cruel oppressors, a thousand conflicting feelings rushed through the

heart of the young Briton. She grew pale and gasped for breath. It was plain from their servile disguise, their agitation and alarm, that some calamity had fallen upon them that had rendered them fugitives. The dress also of Marcus Lælius was deeply stained with blood, and his right arm hung uselessly by his side.

The countenance of Lælia was pale and agonized ; her beautiful hair, of which she had formerly been so proud, was loose and dishevelled ; her eyes were red and swollen from excessive weeping ; she had lost one of her sandals ; her feet were wounded with thorns and briars, and her garments were torn and soiled. All this bespoke some heavy reverse of fortune in which both father and daughter were included.

For a moment all parties remained fixed in a deep and embarrassing silence, which Lælia was the first to break. Her voice was low and tremulous, yet she spoke with her wonted haughtiness. "Alda," said she, "the evil genius of the



Lælii has directed that you should cross our path in an hour when we are smitten of men and abandoned by the gods. You have received hard usage at our hands, and the moment of your revenge is arrived. We are proscribed by the emperor. The price of blood is upon our heads, which you may obtain by denouncing the place of our retreat to those who are fast following upon our traces."

There was something in the conclusion of this speech peculiarly offensive to the young Briton : it added a sting to all the injuries she had received from Lælia, and she proudly answered, "If *you* are capable of the base revenge of betraying a fallen enemy for the sake of paltry gold, know that all the wealth which Rome has in her power to bestow, should not bribe me to the commission of such an action." So saying, she walked from the spot with as haughty an air as Lælia herself could have assumed.

To indulge in haughtiness at such a moment was not the part of a Christian. Alda felt that

it was not, and when she turned about to enter her own dwelling, and glancing back upon the unfortunate Romans, beheld Lælia hanging in all the wildness of despair over the prostrate form of her father, her heart smote her for having entertained a purpose so at variance with the divine precepts of her heavenly Master, as that of abandoning her fallen enemies to their fate in the hour of their bitter distress, when the hand of the Lord had touched them.

Six months previous to this period Alda would have exulted in their sufferings with all the fierce revengeful spirit of her natural character, and would have delighted in poisoning the arrow of affliction, by recalling to the remembrance of her foes every injury they had inflicted upon herself, and pointing out the moral justice of the retribution that had fallen upon them. Even as it was, the evil passions of her nature were for a time victorious over the better purposes of the Christian, when she encountered the angry flash of Lælia's eye as she again ap-

proached her. For Lælia, impressed with the idea that Alda returned only to insult her in her misery, and triumph over her fall, resolving not to appear more humble in her reverse of fortune than she had done in the days of her greatness, surveyed the young Briton with looks of mingled scorn and defiance on her near advance, and said, "Hast thou returned to feast thine eyes with the expiring agonies of my father, and to exult in the calamities that have laid our honours in the dust!"

Alda turned away indignantly once more, and with difficulty repressed the wrathful retort that rose to her lips.

At that moment Marcus Lælius uttered a heavy sigh, and unclosed his eyes. Lælia flung herself upon the ground beside him, raised his languid head, and supported it upon her bosom. She contemplated his deathlike and convulsed features, wrung her hands in anguish, and gazed around her with a wild distracted look, as if in quest of succour for him; while the tears,

which on account of Alda's presence she had hitherto painfully restrained, burst from her eyes in a burning torrent, and fell in large and heavy drops upon her father's face, and her bosom heaved with hysterical sobs which she vainly struggled to repress.

Alda remembered her own unutterable woe when she once knelt beside a dying father, and was only too keenly sensible of the feelings that agonized the heart of the unhappy daughter of Marcus Lælius: she would have addressed her in the language of conciliation, and essayed to speak comfort to her in her sore distress, but her own lip quivered with strong emotion, and she turned hastily away to conceal the overflowing of her eyes. Ere she could recover her composure, the trampling of horses' hoofs was heard clattering up the rocky ascent to the glen.

At that sound the thrill of terror that shot through every fibre of Marcus Lælius' frame, lent a powerful impetus to exhausted nature, and starting from the ground, he exclaimed in a voice of

great alarm, "It is my pursuers: they have traced me to this spot!"

Lælia, forgetting pride, anger, and shame in the intensity of her filial feelings, cast herself at the feet of Alda, and grasping her garments, exclaimed, "Spurn, kill, betray me, if you will, but save my father!"

"Follow me, and I will endeavour to preserve you both," said Alda, greatly moved.

Scarcely had the weary and agitated fugitives gained the threshold of Alda's cottage, when the advancing shadows of the horsemen became visible in the entrance of the glen, cast forward in long gigantic lines by the reflection of the slanting sunbeams.

Alda hurried the alarmed objects of their pursuit within the grotto-chamber of her dwelling, the entrance of which was, as I have before mentioned, concealed from general observation. Perfectly fearless of any ill consequence that might result to herself from the part she had taken, the young Briton then advanced to the

door of her dwelling, in front of which the Roman soldiers had halted.

The appearance and manners of the leader of the party were courteous, and Alda saw at a glance she had little to apprehend from him.

“Pretty maiden,” said he, “can you tell me which way went an old man and a young damsel, habited in the disguise of Helvetian slaves, who must have passed through the valley even now? They are proscribed Romans of high rank, and you will be entitled to a rich reward from the Emperor Nero if you can assist us in tracing their retreat.”

Alda would have perished rather than betray the refuge she had herself afforded to the unfortunate fugitives. She would not stoop to the utterance of an untruth; yet an obstinate silence would have been attended with equal ill consequences to the proscribed Romans as acknowledging their vicinity, and would possibly have provoked the soldiers to inflict tortures upon herself in order to force the secret from her.

In this dilemma Alda made use of no subter-

fuge or evasion, for she boldly answered in the barbarous provincial dialect of the Iceni "that she would rather die than betray the unfortunate objects of their pursuit."


The Roman soldiers, who had never been employed in the wars in Britain, were fairly puzzled, for they did not understand one word of her reply, and the leader laughingly said, "It was strange how such an outlandish torrent of harsh and inexplicable sounds should proceed from such a lovely mouth." He however thought proper to search the little dwelling, which he did without discovering the rocky chamber, the entrance of which was, besides being very artfully concealed, situated in a darksome nook. Finding nothing of a suspicious nature, the chief, after several vain attempts to obtain information by explaining his meaning to Alda by signs, thinking it was to no purpose to waste more time in trifling with her, mounted his horse, and flinging a handful of silver coins to her with a gay air, he rode off at full speed, followed by his party.

The young princess surveyed the money with a glance of ineffable contempt, and as if she thought its vicinity contaminating, spurned it from her threshold in scorn, exclaiming as she did so, "Be-gone, vile trash!—idol of the Romans, for whose sake they have carried blood and desolation into the bosom of every nation under the sun."

When the soldiers were fairly out of sight, and she thought little danger of their return might be apprehended, she hastened to the anxious and disquieted fugitives, and informed them that the peril was past.

Marcus Lælius uttered an ejaculation of thankfulness, and less keenly sensible than his daughter of the humiliation of being indebted for his life to the generous forbearance of a justly-incensed enemy, was profuse in his expressions of gratitude to his former slave, to which he added promises of large rewards in case he should ever be restored to his former wealth and station.

"Had gain been my object, Marcus Lælius," replied the young Briton, with a glance of con-



tempt, "I should not have rejected the gold which the Roman centurion named even now as the price of your apprehension."

"And is it possible, generous slave, that you have rejected such a vast temptation?" returned Marcus Lælius, in a tone of surprise.

"Slight indeed was the effort required for any one to do that, who had just been enabled to overcome the deeper, deadlier suggestions of revenge for many wrongs," rejoined Alda, with quivering lip.

Marcus Lælius remained silent and overwhelmed with confusion, and turned him about to depart. Lælia, more painfully agitated than her father, with emotions of shame and sorrow, attempted to articulate something, but a choking sensation in her throat deprived her of the power of utterance, and she only pressed her hands upon her full heart, and bent her head to Alda as she crossed the threshold to quit her sheltering roof.

There was a still small voice in Alda's bosom that whispered meantime, "Is it sufficient that

you have neither insulted your enemies in their fall, nor refused to conceal them from the pursuit of those who were seeking their lives? Would not even a generous Pagan have acted as you have done? But you are a Christian, and ought to do more. You behold your enemies a hungered, and you have not fed them; they are thirsty, and you have not offered them drink; they are destitute, afflicted, homeless, and pursued by those who seek their blood, and will you suffer them to depart thus from the shelter of your roof?"

Alda resisted not the pleading influence of these suggestions; she hastened to follow the unfortunate Romans, and laying her hand on the arm of the weeping Lælia, she said, "The night is fast approaching, and you are far distant from any habitation: these mountains are the haunt of robbers and wild beasts. Return to my dwelling with your father, and partake of refreshments and rest, and let the remembrance of the past be forgotten between us."

“ Oh ! Alda, you have humbled me more painfully by your unmerited generosity, than if you had planted your foot upon my neck and trampled me in the dust,” said Lælia, bursting into a passion of tears. “ It is not possible that you can forgive me, Alda.”

The young Briton covered her face with one hand to conceal the struggle of her contending feelings, as she held out the other to the penitent Roman in token of her forgiveness.

Lælia threw herself at her feet, pressed it convulsively to her parched and feverish lips, and sobbed aloud in an agony of remorse and self-condemnation.

“ The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise,” said Alda ; “ and shall I, a vile worm, having myself such need of pity and pardon, require more of those who have trespassed against me than my Heavenly Father demands of me ?”

Lælia strove to speak, but the emotions with

which she struggled were too mighty for utterance, and again she sobbed with suffocating violence.

Marcus Lælius, too, was affected to tears ; but the anguish of his daughter was almost as painful for Alda to witness as it was for herself to bear.

“Had vengeance been my desire,” thought Alda, “could it have been more complete if I had listened to the dictates of the evil passions of my nature, and sought it through the unchristian-like medium of triumphing in the sufferings of my fallen foes? I thank Thee, O my God, that thou hast preserved me from so foul a sin as aggravating their misery.”

She then led the unfortunate Romans once more beneath her roof, and ran to fetch water, in order to bathe their swollen and wounded feet ; which most benevolent and acceptable rite of hospitality to the weary travellers she kindly performed with her own hands.

This done she hastened to set before her guests such provisions as her dwelling afforded ; of which she pressed them to partake with a warmth of welcome and unaffected kindness that, if anything could, would have set them at their ease.

Ease was far from their bosoms. Marcus Lælius was indeed relieved from the present apprehension of falling a living prey into the hands of his enemies, yet the restless inquietude of his soul prevented him from enjoying the respite from immediate danger. He started at every sound, and listened with suppressed breath : even the murmur of the rill, the sweep of the mountain-breeze, and the waving of the chestnut-trees that overhung the roof of the cottage were sufficient to fill him with alarm ; while Lælia beheld, in the livid tints of his complexion, the general languor of his air, and the dark shade that rested upon his heavy and sunken eyes, a cause of apprehension scarcely

less painful than the fear of his retreat being traced by the emissaries of the vindictive and remorseless emperor.

CHAPTER XII.

"The grave is not a place of rest,
As unbelievers teach;
Where grief can never win a tear,
Nor sorrow ever reach."—E. FRY.

THROUGH the long and melancholy night Lælia continued to weep, and occasionally to draw such deep sighs as appeared to proceed from a breaking heart.

Was it penitence and self-reproach that caused this violence of grief in the young Roman lady? Or did she lament the heavy reverse of fortune that had deprived her father and herself of all their boasted distinctions of wealth, power, and grandeur, and reduced them to the condition of friendless wanderers, on whose heads the price of blood was fixed, and who were indebted to the

unlooked-for charity of one of their former slaves for the precarious shelter they at present enjoyed? Ah, no: humiliating and distressing as was all this, there was another and a bitterer source of sorrow which Lælia found harder to bear than all that I have enumerated: it was a wound for which she sought no balm, not even from the sympathy of her father.

Marcus Lælius was aware of the cause of his daughter's affliction: he did not attempt to address her on the subject in the language of consolation, for he knew it would be unavailing.

Alda, with that delicacy which is inseparable from noble minds, sought not to inquire into the minutæ of their calamities. She clearly perceived that Marcus Lælius had fallen under the displeasure of the capricious despot his master, and that ruin, proscription, flight, and pursuit had followed as a matter of course. There were other circumstances attending his fall that particularly regarded his daughter, with which she was unacquainted.

Lælia had been sought in marriage by a young, handsome, and victorious Roman general, the object of her fondest affections ; and their nuptials were to have been celebrated on the very day on which her father was denounced to the emperor as a person in whose house secret assemblies for traitorous purposes were held.

The charge was false ; for Marcus Lælius, though perfectly aware of the abuses of Nero's government, and of all the crimes and abominations practised in his name by Nymphidius and Tigellinus, the atrocious ministers of the imperial monster, while their acts of injustice affected not himself, he, like Gallio, cared for none of these things. This mattered not ; he had been rendered an object of suspicion to Nero, and with him suspicion was sufficient warrant for the infliction of imprisonment, tortures, and death, not only on the person accused, but on all his house.

The betrothed of Lælia congratulated himself on his good fortune in not being irretrievably

connected with the family of a proscribed man, and accordingly broke through his contract, with all the precipitation that the urgency of the case in his opinion demanded, and without the slightest consideration for the feelings of his intended bride.

This was a blow for which Lælia was not prepared, and she would have sunk beneath its weight had she not been roused from the indulgence of her own grief by the imminent peril of her father's situation. Fortunately for them they were residing at their magnificent villa at Tusculum at the period of Marcus Lælius' disgrace; and this circumstance afforded a facility for their escape, which they effected by assuming the disguise of slaves. And had not that disguise been betrayed by the treacherous Zopha to those who were despatched from Rome with orders from the emperor to apprehend both father and daughter, they would in all probability have baffled all pursuit. But that clue and the information of the direction which they had taken, and the temptation of the large

reward offered for their apprehension, induced several parties to set forth in hope of tracing the unfortunate fugitives, who were finally overtaken by two of their pursuers in a lonely spot near the valley wherein Alda had taken up her abode.

Marcus Lælius defended himself with the fury of despair, and succeeded in killing one of his assailants and disabling the other, though not without himself receiving several very severe wounds, which, together with anxiety of mind, fatigue, and exhaustion, reduced him to the deplorable state in which he appeared when he and his daughter were encountered by Alda; and, but for the unexpected shelter afforded them so promptly by her, they must both have fallen into the hands of the Roman soldiers, who followed hard upon their traces.

The last spark of hostility towards her unhappy guests died away in the bosom of Alda, as she contemplated the anguish of mind that was so deeply imprinted upon the countenances of both. She had prepared her own bed for the

accommodation of Marcus Lælius, and cheerfully resigned it for his use, while she took her station beside it, to share his daughter's melancholy vigils. The pain of his wounds had brought on a raging access of fever, that was greatly aggravated by the inquietude of his spirit, and his symptoms became so alarming that the unhappy Lælia forgot her own bitter regrets and sorrows in her filial fears. Nor would she listen to the solicitations of Alda, though painfully seconded by the pleadings of exhausted nature, that she should endeavour to snatch a few moments of repose, after the unwonted fatigues of mind and body that she had undergone.

I will not attempt to paint the feelings with which the two maidens watched by the restless bed of the unhappy man, through the long and dreary hours of darkness. During this period the irritable impatience and frantic alarm of the departing sufferer were absolutely frightful, and filled his bewildered daughter with anguish and dismay. His proud and flattering pro-

jects for this life were miserably reversed and destroyed, and for him the future offered neither hope nor comfort.

Lælia besought him to call upon the gods for help. He laughed with bitter contempt at the idea of receiving aid from them, since he had no longer the means of propitiating them by laying votive offerings upon their altars.


"You can vow large offerings to them in case they should ever enable you to regain your former station and the means of performing your sacrifices in their temples," said Lælia.

"The gods have record of too many of my broken promises for me to hope they will listen to me in an hour like this," returned Marcus Lælius, gloomily. "On the contrary, I feel too fearfully convinced that they will take vengeance upon me for all my past offences against both them and my fellow-creatures."

"From the gods whom you serve, Marcus Lælius, there is nothing to be either hoped or feared, for they are dumb idols, the work of

men's hands, incapable of resisting or avenging any injury that can be offered to them ; and those who put their trust in them are like unto them," said Alda, who could no longer refrain from speaking. "The God whom I adore, the invisible but Almighty Ruler of the universe, whose power exceedeth all ideas that can enter into the frail and bounded comprehension of man to conceive of him, is a God of mercy, 'long-suffering, and of great goodness, slow to anger, and repenteth him of the evil.' He requires neither oblation nor votive offering ; but one tear of true repentance and sorrow for sin is more precious in his sight than whole hecatombs of burnt-offerings and sacrifices. Oh ! turn you, therefore, unto him, and He shall be found as a present refuge in the day of trouble ; and though you are heavy laden with the burden of your sins, yet with him there is mercy and plenteous redemption."

Lælia listened with eager interest to these words, and implored her father to incline his ear



also. Marcus Lælius sullenly told her "that it would be of no avail for him to listen to delusive hopes, for there was no god who could promise forgiveness of sins."

"No god of wood or stone or molten metal, certainly," replied Alda; "yet He who formed the heavens and earth and all things therein by the fulness of his power, He who hath created us of the dust of the earth, knowing our frailty and proneness to do evil, hath provided a remedy and atonement for all our sins, and not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world."

She then went on to explain the nature of that remedy, and the things that were required of those who wished to be made partakers of the means of grace and the hope of glory.

Lælia continued to weep as she listened, but they were softer tears than those she had yet shed. And Alda, as she contemplated the effects which her discourse had produced upon the haughty Roman maiden, trusted her pre-

sent affliction had been laid upon her in mercy, as a way by which she was to be eventually led from the paths of error and pagan darkness, to embrace the salvation offered freely and without price to the converts to Christianity.

Towards morning Marcus Lælius grew evidently worse; so much so, that it became apparent, not only to Alda but to his sorrowful daughter, that the hour of his dissolution was near at hand. Yet he clung to life with a frightful tenacity, and expressed such alarm and horror at the idea of death, that Lælia, in the midst of her grief, could not forbear saying, "You were always accounted a valiant man in the day of battle, my father; why then are you thus cast down at the thought of death?"

"Because it is a new and untried warfare," he replied; "a battle in which valour will avail me nothing, a contest for which I have no armour of defence."

"Oh! listen to Alda, my father! and she will

tell you of that which will bring you hope and comfort."

The Roman turned his heavy, glaring eyes upon the face of the young Briton with a doubtful and despairing glance.

"Speak, Alda, speak ! for my father will hearken to you now," exclaimed Lælia. "Oh, tell him the glad tidings of the pardon and peace which the God of the Christians has promised to those who will trust in Him."

"Ha !" shrieked Marcus Lælius ; "wouldst thou increase my despair by speaking to me of the Christian's God in an hour like this ? Will He not avenge the sufferings of his people upon me who have been one of their bloodiest persecutors ? Nay, interrupt me not, Lælia. I know what you would say, for I have heard all that has passed between you and the British damsel this dreadful night, and I am convinced that the God whom the Christians serve is the only true God, and that those whom we have worshipped are but worthless toys."

"Nay then, be of good cheer, Marcus Lælius," said Alda; "for if thine eyes are indeed opened to the light of truth, it shall be well with thee, since it is written, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.'"

"I believe, indeed," said Marcus Lælius, in a hollow, broken voice; "yet it is only to increase my despair;—I see, but it is too late. My thoughts carry me back to the bloody scenes of the amphitheatre, and the memory of a thousand crimes rises before me; heaviest of all, my persecution of the innocent Christians weighs upon my departing spirit."

Lælia threw herself upon the ground, and sobbed in unavailing anguish.

"Oh that I knew how to speak peace to you!" exclaimed the horror-stricken Alda to the dying man.

"Peace!" echoed he, "peace! mock me not with the word! but give me a day, an hour of life!" he continued with frightful vehemence. "What should two simple girls do to help me

in this perilous crisis of my fate? If, indeed, a physician were near to dispense medicine to lull this fever and quench this burning thirst, or to pour balm into my throbbing wounds, I might yet recover. And it is hard to die for want of aid!"

"O Alda!" said Lælia, "is there no possibility of procuring medicines for my unhappy father?"

Alda thought it possible that some one among the Christian colony might practise the healing art. Both father and daughter caught eagerly at the suggestion; and Lælia implored her passionately to hasten thither, and prevail on some one who might chance to possess a knowledge of medicine to visit her father.

"I will go, since you desire it," said Alda; "but, O Lælia, be prepared for the worst, and place not your trust in an arm of flesh!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Nay, fear not, sad vessel; though tempests deform
The vexed ocean of life, there's a hope 'midst the storm,—
The life-boat of mercy unpurchased and free,
An ark of salvation for lost ones like thee.

THE day had dawned, but the sun had not yet risen, when the young Briton set forth on her mission to the Christian settlement in the mountain-glen. The clear, sharp air of the early morning was as medicine and refreshment to her after the sleepless and agitating night she had passed by the death-bed of the wretched Marcus Lælius.

Exerting all the speed which youth, strength, and mental energy could lend, she reached the little colony before the matin-service commenced, and was received with fatherly kindness by Au-

relius, the patriarch of the Christian flock, who as soon as he learnt the cause of her visit, readily undertook to accompany her on her return, to render all the assistance in his power to the dying Roman.

Alda only tarried for rest and refreshment, while Aurelius prepared in haste such medicines as he judged might prove beneficial to the wounded man, and they both commenced their walk to the valley with such speed as they deemed the urgency of the case required. The way was long and the path toilsome for the old man, and finding it impossible to regulate his motions so as to keep pace with the eager impatience of his youthful companion, whose sympathies were powerfully excited in behalf of the lonely and forlorn guests, who she well knew would be impatiently counting the moments till her return, he bade her hasten forward to rejoin them. Since all the passes of the mountain were so well known to him, that she had only to describe the situation and leading features of the valley in

which her home was situated, to enable him to find it, she did so ; and bounding forward with the speed of a young deer, she paused no more till she reached her own dwelling. She unclosed the door cautiously, for she thought it possible that one or other of the sad inmates whom she had left therein, worn out with sorrow and fatigue, might have obtained a short interval of slumber which she would have been reluctant to dispel.

But the bright stream of sunshine which the opening door admitted into the apartment cast an unwelcome radiance on the pale statue-like features of Lælia, as she sat motionless on the ground, with clasped hands and dishevelled hair, and eyes that had wept till they could weep no more, supporting on her knees her father's head—that head which was no longer conscious of her support.

She uttered a stifled cry, as the warm, brilliant beams of the morning sun flashed upon the face of the deceased, and revealed the awful change that had taken place in his countenance ; and she

pressed her hands over her eyes as if she would have excluded the light of day from those sad and tear-swollen orbs for ever.

Alda approached her with the tenderest compassion, took her damp cold hand, and spoke to her in the soothing voice of sympathy. For some minutes Lælia appeared unconscious of her presence, or regarded her with a vacant uncomprehending gaze, as if scarcely aware of her identity : at length she seemed suddenly to recollect herself, and exclaimed, " You are returned then ;— it is too late—for he—he is gone. The last tie is rent asunder that bound me to any living creature, and I am wholly desolate."

" Say not so, Lælia," said Alda, tenderly, " for you have a sister here ; one who like yourself has known adversity and been acquainted with many sorrows, who has felt all that you feel, and yet has learnt to bless the Almighty hand from which her chastening proceeded, and to say, ' It is good for me that I have been afflicted, for before I was troubled I went wrong.' Sorrow not, therefore, as

one without hope, for you have yet a Heavenly Father who will in no wise reject you, if you flee to him for succour. Let us therefore love one another, even as He has loved us, and become united in his service."


The young Briton extended her arms towards her former enemy as she spoke. Lælia sunk upon her bosom, forgetful of every former difference between them, "and wept, oh how familiarly !"

Alda folded her arms about her, and mingled her tears with hers, and from that hour these heretofore jarring spirits ceased to remember every hostile distinction of national animosity and wrathful feeling of pride and prejudice that had once inflamed their hearts with mutual anger and hatred against each other, and became as sisters indeed. The ties of consanguinity never cemented a firmer bond of friendship than that which was formed between the twain; for Lælia, while she abhorred herself for her past cruelty and oppression to Alda, loved her in pro-

portion to the greatness of the debt of injury she had forgiven her ; while Alda, experiencing in its fullest extent the truth of that divine axiom, " It is more blessed to give than to receive," loved her the better because she had forgiven her.

But the young Roman lady became an object of yet deeper and tenderer interest to Alda. An alarming fever attacked her the very night they had consigned the remains of her father to the grave, in which melancholy duty they were assisted by Aurelius, who tarried with them to render his aid in that sad but necessary office. Afterwards he prolonged his stay for the purpose of watching over the suffering Lælia, and endeavouring to check the apparently fatal progress of a disorder that reduced her to infantine weakness, and brought her to the verge of the tomb.

Youth, however, aided by the tender care of Alda and the medical skill of Aurelius, enabled Lælia to overcome the violence of the malady, and she slowly advanced towards convalescence.



Aurelius then returned to his flock, from whom he had been many days absent, but promised to take an early opportunity of revisiting the two young maidens, in whose welfare he felt a deep and tender interest.

The character of Lælia's sorrow appeared to have taken a complete change since the period of her illness : she had ceased to weep, she uttered no complaint, and sedulously avoided all allusions to her past misfortunes, so that Alda would have believed she had become resigned to the vicissitudes she had undergone, had not the settled and unvaried despondency of her look and manner revealed a tale of inward suffering too great to be expressed in words.

The sickness of the body had subsided, but the fever of the mind remained unabated. Alda strove by every means in her power to rouse her from this morbid melancholy ; but the sad smile with which Lælia was accustomed to receive and acknowledge these marks of solicitude was evidently so forced and joyless that Alda would

rather have seen her give way to a gush of tears.

There was also a disinclination in her to take the air and exercise so requisite for the re-establishment of her health. Alda grew uneasy at this, and one lovely spring morning entreated her sad companion to try the reviving influence of the sunshine and the mountain-breeze. Lælia passively complied, with a look that told how utterly indifferent all things were to her now.

Alda, on the contrary, who had suffered from long confinement and protracted vigils by the sick bed of the young Roman, felt a joyous animation in breathing the fresh pure air, with the genial beams of the morning sun shining upon her. To her the waving of the green forests that lay at their feet, the song of the merry birds, the flight of the enfranchised butterfly, and the murmur of the wild-bee were sights and sounds pregnant with delight. They carried her back in fancy to the still dear scenes of her childhood and

the land of her birth ; and oftentimes she paused to gather the mountain ranunculus and other blossoms that studded her path, with the same feelings of pleasure with which she was wont, when a little child, to cull her simple posies of primroses, violets, and briar-roses in her native Britain.

It was not without surprise that the high-born Roman lady, who had been reared in the lap of luxury and wealth, and had never formed an idea of happiness that was not somehow or other connected with ambition, splendour, or love, could behold the enjoyment the simple and unsophisticated child of nature appeared to derive from collecting a handful of wild flowers. While Lælia was silently musing on this, the young Briton uttered a joyful cry, for she had just discovered a tuft of violets, and holding up one of the purple blossoms, she exclaimed, " Flower of my country ! and art thou, like myself, a dweller in a foreign land ? "

There was transport in Alda's tone and look ; but the next moment her eyes grew misty with

unwonted moisture, and the flower was bedewed with her fast-falling tears. Then, as if ashamed of her emotion, she swept the bright drops hastily away that hung upon her long, dark eyelashes, and observing that Lælia looked fatigued and very pale, she led her to a mossy hillock, beneath the rich shade of a spreading chestnut-tree, made her sit down, and placing herself at her feet, employed herself in weaving garlands of the wild flowers for her amusement, and endeavoured to beguile her melancholy with gay and lively conversation. This did not suit Lælia's present frame of mind ; by her interest and curiosity were both excited the young Briton, and she requested her with some emotion to relate her whole history, together with the particulars of her escape. Alda complied, yet not without some persuasion, for her native feelings of delicacy told her there was much that must necessarily be painful for Lælia to hear.

Lælia was much touched with the young Briton's simple and pathetic narration, and when

she had concluded, asked her if it were indeed possible that she could forgive her all the injurious treatment she had received at her hands.

"I would that remembrance of the things whereof you speak were as thoroughly effaced from your mind, Lælia, as all resentful feelings respecting them are from mine," returned Alda, taking her hand and pressing it kindly.

Lælia was deeply moved with Alda's generous conduct, and in her turn related to her the secret source of her own sorrow.

"Oh that you could perceive the hand of the Lord in this affliction that weighs so heavily upon your rebellious spirit, my daughter," said Aurelius, who had undesignedly heard enough of the conversation to enable him to understand the nature of Lælia's grief. She cast her eyes upon the ground and continued to weep in silence.

The old man seated himself beside her, and taking her hand continued: "You sorrow now, and refuse to be comforted, for the loss of that which has been taken from you in wisdom and in

mercy by your Heavenly Father ; believe me, my child, the time will come when you will perceive the utter worthlessness of the things which you now lament, and which never could have satisfied the desires of an immortal spirit." He then, seeing that she was too much distressed to bear further conversation on the subject of her grief, drew from his bosom the roll of the sacred volume, and proceeded to read some of the beautiful histories it contained, by way of diverting the sad thoughts of Lælia from her own unprofitable and vain regrets, and at the same time improving both the young converts in scriptural knowledge. For Alda neither possessed a copy of the Scriptures, nor the learning necessary to decipher its contents even if she had been so enriched. All her acquaintance with its general history proceeded from the oral instruction she had received from Susanna, who knew great part of the Old Testament by heart, and was wont to repeat many passages from it aloud daily : to Lælia it was as yet a sealed volume.

Both the damsels listened with lively emotion to those portions which Aurelius chose for their instruction ; but when he proceeded to read from beginning to end the beautiful and pathetic history of Joseph and his brethren, both wept profusely, especially at that passage in which Joseph, with that generous delicacy which is more touching than any other part of his truly angelic conduct towards his guilty and self-condemned brethren, endeavours to lighten the weight of their remorseful feelings, by saying, “ Now, therefore, be ye not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sent me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life,” and Alda, moved with a corresponding feeling, drew the weeping Lælia towards her, and leaning her head upon her shoulder kissed her pale, tearful cheek, and said, “ Was it not even thus with us, my sister ? Therefore cease, I pray you, to weep and accuse yourself for the past.”

Lælia only replied with her tears, but Aurelius was happy to perceive that the story had pro-

duced the desired effect of touching the softer chords of feeling in her bosom, and unlocking the fountain of grief which had been long frozen up and sealed in her sad heart.

When Aurelius had concluded the history of the patriarch, he went on to explain to Lælia from Scripture itself the consoling doctrine of the Christian faith, and carefully pointed out the conditions on which remission of sins and everlasting happiness are promised to the world.

Lælia, from whom the prospects of earthly joy were for ever closed, felt a new-born trembling hope spring within her heart as she listened to the venerable ambassador of peace. She had made pleasure her sole business in life, and happiness the object of her pursuit ; but she had sought it erringly, and therefore hers had been a fruitless chase, begun in folly and ending in despair.

She had drunk of the cup of ambition and worldly greatness, and though it had appeared sweet to the taste, it had eventually proved a draught of bitterness. Power, wealth, and luxury

had all been hers, yet she found no satisfaction in the retrospect, and even while they were in her possession she had been ready to exclaim, like the royal philosopher, "All this is vanity and vexation of spirit !"

Weary and heavy laden with the burden of that care which is enmity to the soul, and oppressed with that sorrow which worketh death, she first beheld the shining of that light which showed her the way by which a better inheritance might be secured, and she hailed it as a beacon of hope which would guide her tempest-tost bark to a haven of peace, from the storms and vicissitudes of earthly projects and earthly disappointments.

A calm like that which composes the agitated waves after they have been tossed to and fro by the inconstant and tyrannous winds succeeded to the gloom and disquietude which had so long distracted the heart of the young Roman. She had become resigned to the dispensations of her Heavenly Father, for she had fled to the foot of

the cross, and there found that rest and tranquillity which the world could never bestow.

She was now anxious to be admitted into the Christian church by baptism; but as her health was not sufficiently established to render her equal to the fatigue of undertaking a journey to the glen where the Christian colony was settled, Aurelius imposed upon her a few days of further preparation, during which he frequently visited the young friends for the purpose of explaining to them the most important passages of Holy Writ.

These days were days of serenity and holy joy to all. Mainos, the British chief, who had abandoned the life of a robber, was also added to their company, and heard Aurelius gladly on those matters in which Alda had so often laboured to instruct him, and he now rejoiced her by declaring his conversion to the Christian faith, and his desire to receive the rite of baptism. This was appointed by Aurelius to take place on the following Sabbath, at which time Lælia was also to be admitted into the visible church of Christ.

CHAPTER XIV.

Strong in the great Redeemer's name,
They bore the cross, despised the shame;
And like their Master here,
Wrestled with danger, pain, distress,
And every form of fear.—MONTGOMERY.

THE sun rose in unclouded splendour on the
“hallowed stillness of the Sabbath morn,” when
Alda, with a heart overflowing with holy zeal,
accompanied the two proselytes to the general
assembly of Christians in the mountain-glen,
and witnessed their baptism, with such feelings
as those with which the angels of God view
an immortal soul redeemed from the bondage
of sin and Satan, and snatched like a brand from
the burning.

The rocks and valleys were yet vocal with the
baptismal hymn, when a sound of woe and hor-

Q

ror interrupted the sacred harmony, and changed the ecstatic feelings of many of the assembly to dismay, as the fearful cry, "The heathen—the heathen are upon us!" broke from the lips of those who were not so absorbed in the act of adoration as to be insensible of the danger that had come upon them in an hour when they least expected it. The next minute the greater part of the congregation were scattered among the hills like sheep that had no shepherd, yielding to the same strong impulse of human frailty which induced the terror-stricken twelve to provide for their own safety in flight, when they beheld their heavenly Master in the hands of remorseless and murderous men.

But there were those among the assembly who nobly stood the test, and calmly awaited the approach of the Roman soldiers. Aurelius remained standing at the rude altar of unhewn stone, on which the consecrated elements for the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's supper were displayed.

Lælia and Mainos, clothed in the white robes of Neophytes, which they had just assumed, continued kneeling motionless at his feet, while Alda with a few other devoted Christians, not insensible of the peril, yet perfectly unruffled by its terrors, stood beside them, with looks of high resolve and pious resignation to the will of God.

It was a group that might have formed a study for the pencil of Salvator Rosa, when the Roman centurion advanced to lay his ruffian hands upon the venerable priest. At that sight the newly-baptized British chief, forgetful that he had just been invested with the white robe of peace, started from his kneeling posture, and wrestling a sword from the grasp of one of the soldiers, before Aurelius himself was aware of his purpose, laid the centurion who had offered violence to his sacred person dead at his feet, and fiercely planted himself before the altar to defend it from the insults of the idolatrous soldiers.

“Put up thy sword, my son!” cried Aurelius. “Knowest thou not that the servants of

Christ are forbidden to repel violence by violence?"

The warlike Briton was deaf to his remonstrance, and dealt his terrible blows to right and left with such determined fury, that their assailants were for a moment paralyzed, and shrunk from the encounter of his dreadful arm; but his valour was unavailing against the overwhelming numbers who bore down upon him, and presently stretched his stately form in dust at the foot of the altar that he had vainly endeavoured to defend from the sacrilegious outrages of the foes.

His blood was sprinkled on the white robe of his fellow-neophyte, who sunk half fainting on the bosom of Alda.

"Courage, my sister!" said the young Briton, though her own cheek wore the same pale hue as Lælia's, on witnessing the fate of her friend and countryman. "These are the perils to which we are baptized."

"It is woman's natural weakness thus to shrink from human blood shed in her immediate

presence," returned Lælia, pointing to the sanguine spots upon her garments. "Had it been my own, I trust you would not have seen me falter, Alda. Nay, rather, I believe I should have blessed the Lord that he had been pleased to shorten the days of my troublous pilgrimage."

The cruel soldiers now surrounded their unresisting prisoners, bound them with cords, and chained them two-and-two, not without many brutal insults, and then obliged them to set forth on their toilsome march to Rome.

Lælia, whose recent illness and general delicacy of habit rendered her very unequal to the fatigue of performing such a journey on foot, suffered much ; but she suffered silently, and endeavoured to bear up against bodily weakness with a degree of resolution that was almost heroic, unaccustomed as she had been to any sort of hardship or privation.

Alda cheered, supported, and encouraged her with the utmost tenderness, and sometimes sus-

tained the whole weight of her sinking form for miles.

At length a brief interval of rest was acceded to the whole party by the commander of the Roman soldiers ; not from any motives of compassion towards his weary and fasting prisoners, but because himself and his followers experienced inconvenience from traversing the rough mountain-paths at the sultry meridian of the day, for it was unusually hot for the season.

The halt took place in one of the lovely groves of Tusculum, on the banks of a clear stream, whose murmuring waters diffused a delicious coolness around. The prisoners were allowed to slake their parching thirst with a draught of the refreshing element ; and Alda prevailed on one of the soldiers, more humane than his comrades, to bring her a supply of the same in his helmet, with which she bathed the hands and face of her exhausted companion, who had fainted upon her bosom, overcome with heat and fatigue.

The repose of two hours, however, greatly

revived her, and she was one of the first to rise in obedience to the signal for recommencing the march; and turning to Alda, who was surveying her with an anxious scrutiny, she said, "Fear not that I shall be found wanting when the hour cometh. I would it were already at hand. But there is an intermediate step between this and death that I cannot anticipate without agony. I mean the public entrance into Rome—that worst and bitterest pang which we shall shortly be called upon to experience. O Alda! think of the degradation of being exposed to the gaze and mockery of the rude plebeians! and worse, far worse, to be looked upon with insolent disdain by those heartless patricians who formerly pretended friendship to my father and myself, and in the hour of our adversity coldly left us to our fate or exulted in our fall."

"Is it possible, Lælia, that you can suffer their opinion to inflict a moment's pain upon you?" said Alda, with surprise.

"Oh, but to enter the proud city where I am so



well known, in chains ; and to be pointed at as if I were a criminal !" returned Lælia, with a look of agony.

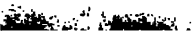
" Ah, Lælia ! remember who for your sake endured the cross, despising the shame thereof, and shrink not from the light affliction to which you are called, nor suffer thoughts like these to steal over the brightness of your spirit ! What now to you, my sister, is that world from whence you are fast journeying for ever, that you should look back upon it, after you have set your face heavenward, or suffer one uneasy reflection respecting the opinions of the blind and miserable people of Rome, who, if they beheld you as you really are, might envy you the glorious destiny which you are called upon to fulfil ? "

" I mourn for my own weakness," replied Lælia ; " and I pray that I may be enabled to overcome the coward frailty which causes me to shrink ; not from the prospect of death, but from the approaching trial of entering Rome as a public gazing-stock."

"*I have entered Rome as a public gazing-stock once before, when I walked in chains by the side of my broken-hearted and dying father, in the triumph of one of your generals,*" said Alda, turning very pale as she recurred to the circumstance. "*This day I shall enter Rome a second time as a prisoner, and a public spectacle withal, and also in a triumph; but this time the triumph will be mine, for I go to obtain the high prize of my calling,—the glorious crown of a Christian martyr; and I shall tread her streets with the exulting step of a victor.*"

The bright face of Alda beamed with rapturous enthusiasm as she concluded; and Lælia, catching her ardour, exclaimed, "O Alda! how could my erring thoughts glance to the right or left, or droop earthward, with such a goal in view as that towards which we are pressing!"

Strange and tumultuous feelings agitated the heart of the young Briton as they approached the walls of the imperial city, and she said to herself, "Little did I think when I left this



place as a fugitive, with a heart swelling with indignation against my haughty Roman mistress, from whose cruel usage I fled to the haunts of the robber and the wild beasts of the forest, that we should return as companions, as friends, and as fellow-heirs to glory, to be united in a death of torture, as martyrs to the only true faith."

Lælia had meantime recovered her composure ; and not merely that outward forced appearance of tranquillity which is the result of pride, but the inward, deep serenity which proceeds from resignation to the will of God ; and in that spirit she was enabled to approach Rome with calmness to meet the trials which awaited her.


It was evening when they entered the imperial city, and the streets were thronged with a mixed multitude ; the plebeian orders just released from the toils and business of the day, either wending homewards, or loitering in idle groups to discuss the news and gossip of Rome, and the patricians, courtiers, soldiers, and senators issuing forth in

quest of pleasure, eager to kill time in amusements, or drown thought in intemperance.

To these the distressed and weary prisoners were objects of unfeeling curiosity. All classes united in impeding them in their march, and insulting them with their rude gaze and ribald jests; and it was evident that they were already delighting themselves with the barbarous anticipation of beholding them expire in tortures in the blood-stained amphitheatre.

To the high-born and delicately nurtured Roman maid these things were, as she had anticipated, a fearful overflowing of the cup of bitterness: she was doomed to drink of its very dregs ere her chastening was complete.

More than once she endured the mortification of hearing herself recognised as the daughter of the proscribed traitor Marcus Lælius by some former invidious associate or pitiless enemy, who coupled epithets with the names both of her father and herself, such as would in days past have excited her to a pitch of ungovernable fury.



Now she was enabled to bear it meekly, and she listened rather in sorrow than in anger to the revilings of both treacherous friends and cruel foes.

As they approached the temple of Juno the progress of the devoted train was stopped by a concourse of people who had gathered there to witness a nuptial procession of uncommon splendour that was just descending the steps of the portico, preceded by priests, augurs, minstrels, musicians, and torch-bearers, and followed by a long train of noble ladies and men of the highest rank and consideration in the imperial court.

The liberality of the bridegroom's donations to the populace was acknowledged with such loud acclamations, that his name, resounding as it did from all the echoes of the seven hills of Rome; failed not to reach the ears of the Christian prisoners, who were upon the very spot. To all of these, save one, it was a matter of less than no importance. That unhappy one was the daughter of Marcus Lælius, and to her ear its sound was

as a knell. Yet scarcely crediting that she heard aright, she cast a wild and hurried glance upon the procession, and recognized in the bridegroom her own betrothed and faithless lover, Quintus Flavius.

The next moment the nuptial train with its glare of torches and triumphant swell of music had passed away like the fleeting pageant of a midnight dream, and Lælia was rudely commanded to move on ; for she had paused, and remained motionless, gazing on the vacant porch of the idol temple.

“It is done!” she said ; “yes, the last strong tie that bound me to the world is broken ! Truly did Aurelius warn me that the time would come in which I should be convinced of the worthlessness of the idol to which I obstinately and blindly clung. It was a blow for which I was not prepared : it is dealt to me in mercy, or I should have looked back and lingered on the threshold of eternity. But now, O my sister, my companion, my guide, and mine own sweet

familiar friend ! I shall follow thy heavenward steps rejoicingly, for I have seen the vanity and delusion of the things of this world, and am eager to be at rest from its profitless turmoils."

CHAPTER XV.

Blest train of martyred saints, arise!
Look upward to your native skies;
Behold the promised golden throne,
The conquering palm, the unfading crown.

DALE.

THAT night the captive Christians were thrust into a dungeon in one of the prisons appropriated for the reception of the lowest and most infamous criminals. To those who looked upon the intermediate time between themselves and eternity in the light of a brief but stormy passage to a land of everlasting brightness and rejoicing, the place in which that period might be passed appeared perfectly immaterial; and as they spent the greater part of the night in the exercises of devotion, the murky prison-house was converted for a time into a temple of the living God.

Towards morning Aurelius recommended his little flock to endeavour to obtain the refreshment of an hour's sleep, in order that their corporeal powers might be recruited against the dreadful trials with which they would be assailed on the morrow.

The young and ardent British convert experienced too lofty an excitation of spirit to feel the slightest inclination for repose ; she continued wrapt in an ecstasy of high and heavenly meditation, while Lælia, worn out with unwonted fatigue of body and painful agitation of mind, had sunk upon the cold stones of the dungeon-floor, and pillowing her weary head on Alda's lap, slumbered profoundly.

Aurelius, who like Alda had kept uninterrupted vigils during that night, roused the devoted members of his little congregation before the crowing of the second cock ; but observing with compassion the increased traces of illness in the face of the young Roman lady, on whose features the early beams of morning were reflected from

the grated apertures immediately above her, which admitted a feeble and stinted portion of light into the dungeon, and revealed the death-like paleness of her face, would not permit her to be disturbed from the deep repose in which she lay so completely lulled that it was not till the full swell of the hymn, with which her fellow-prisoners concluded their early offering of prayer and praise, broke upon her ear, that her heavy slumbers were dispelled, and she awakened to consciousness of the following strains of adoration.

HYMN.

Thou, Lord, the balm of hope canst bring
To hearts by sorrow riven;
And taught by Thee faith's soaring wing
Explores the path to heaven.

Thy smile the dungeon's dark recess
Can brighten and illumine,
And in the barren wilderness
Bid Sharon's roses bloom.

Thou on the death-doomed captive's eye
Canst fadeless glories shed,
And teach his feet exultingly
The grave's dread bounds to tread.

E'en now our wakening souls prepare
To quit earth's low abode;
And freed from mortal pain and care,
To flee to Thee, O God.

With thee, O Lord, is peace and joy,
And everlasting rest,
And bliss that shares no base alloy,
The portion of the blest.

Lælia started from the ground as the sacred melody died away, and clasping her arms about Alda, exclaimed, "Alda, my sister, are we already there?"

"Where, Lælia?" demanded Alda, returning her embrace.

"In heaven, Alda; surely I dreamt even now that the dread conflict was ended, and I heard the seraphic songs of the beatified spirits, in which we all appeared to join."

"It was a dream, young maiden, that will speedily be realized to you and all of us," observed Aurelius, "unless any should be found among us (which may God forbid) who may faint with heaven in view."

“Father, let us join in earnest prayer to Him of whom strength cometh, that we may all endure unshrinkingly unto the end,” said Lælia; and Aurelius commenced a supplication to the throne of grace to that effect, in which all present fervently united. But while the death-doomed captives were thus employed, the continued trampling of the multitude, and the rolling of chariot-wheels in the streets above, reached their ears in the depths of the dungeon, resembling at that distance the incessant ebb and flow of the waves on the sea-shore in sound, and warned them that the hour was now at hand, in which they would be called upon to stand the last awful test of their faith.

The eager and tumultuous rush of people was towards the amphitheatre, which promised them that day the excitement of a pageant still more attractive to their barbarous and depraved tastes than even that of a show of gladiators, condemned to destroy each other in mortal combat in the blood-stained arena, and thus to afford an hour

of savage amusement to those whose hard hearts could derive pleasure from contemplating the expiring agonies of their fellow-creatures.

Was it not indeed the practice of such atrocities that drew at length the vengeance of Heaven upon guilty Rome, that persecuting city of paganism, which is aptly figured in the mystic language of the Apocalypse as a harlot clothed in scarlet, and sitting upon her seven hills, drunk with the blood of martyrs! Well indeed might the holy exile of Patmos, in whose day these abominations were commenced, and who might be said to have been an eye-witness of the fiery persecutions raised by Nero against the Christians, apply this metaphor to the imperial city of the Cæsars.

“My children,” said Aurelius to his Christian followers, as the doors of the dungeon were thrown open by the Roman soldiers appointed to conduct them to death, “I must warn ye that a strong temptation will be offered ye this day. Pray that ye may be enabled to resist the snare

of the enemies of your souls, and to press onward victoriously to obtain the prize of your high calling, for ye will be offered life on the terms of committing an act of idolatry."

The caution of Aurelius appeared unnecessary to those who witnessed the alacrity with which the devoted train moved forward to obey a summons to a death of unknown tortures. There was not a single lingerer in the dungeon, nor a look cast backward as they proceeded through the crowded streets that led to the amphitheatre.

When they entered the fatal portico, they were, as Aurelius had predicted, offered their lives on the light alternative (as it appeared to some) of casting a handful of incense on the fires that were kindled on the altars of the idol-gods of Rome, and at the same moment was heard from within the crowded amphitheatre the barbarous shout of the eager spectators, now grown impatient for the sight of their bloody spectacle.

"The Christians to the lions! the Christians to the lions!" announced to the devoted victims

for the first time the nature of the death to which they were sentenced. Aurelius heard it with a calm smile, and putting back the offered incense with an abhorrent gesture, he passed with a firm step through the unfolded gates of the arena to meet his fate. His example was followed by those of the prisoners who immediately succeeded him in the file of the doomed procession, and then the gates were suddenly closed, having admitted as many victims as the ruthless spectators chose to see exposed at one time to the fury of the wild beasts.

The next moment the breathless hush of interest was broken by a loud and terrific roar, echoed by a general shriek from the female part of the spectators, which announced the entrance of the hungry lions. A tumultuous shout of fiend-like exultation declared the instant of their rush upon their human prey. A second acclamation, long and continued, followed by the throwing open of the gates for the admittance of fresh victims, proclaimed to those without the completion of the

work of death. Six of the captive Christians had already sealed the profession of their faith with their blood. Alda and Lælia, as the youngest of the prisoners, closed the rear of the remaining six, and with a thrill of horror beheld the four who should have preceded them through the gates of the fatal arena, turn pale and falter when the same alternative was offered to them which had been so bravely rejected by Aurelius and his fellow-martyrs ; and finally, as the amphitheatre again rang with the appalling cry, " The Christians to the lions ! " with trembling hands and averted eyes cast the incense upon the altars on which the idolatrous fires were burning, thus basely purchasing an exemption from their sentence at the fearful price of apostasy from their God.

Alda, with an anxious misgiving at her heart, turned an inquiring eye upon the marble features of her pale, sinking companion, dreading lest she also should fail in this awful moment ; but when she met the glance of lorty and settled resolution

that beamed in the dark melancholy eyes of the young Roman, which were at that moment raised to heaven in deep but silent prayer, she reproached herself for having allowed a doubt of the firmness of Lælia's faith to cross her mind, which, if of a less glowing and impassioned nature, was no less enduring than her own.

"Alda," said she, "dost thou perceive what those wretched men have done?"

"I do," said Alda, "and I pray that God may forgive them, and preserve us from yielding to the like temptation, for behold the moment is at hand."

Here the incense was tendered to the young friends; and the priest of Jupiter, moved with compassion on observing their youth and beauty and the tender union that appeared to subsist between them, exerted all his eloquence and sophistry to induce them to escape the horrors of the death that awaited them, by the performance of a simple act of homage to the statue of his god. But they rejected the terms with calm

dignity, and entered the fatal arena with unshrinking firmness.

Their appearance drew forth a murmur of admiration, almost of compassion, from the spectators who thronged the seats of the vast amphitheatre. Even the flinty-hearted emperor, when he beheld the heroic composure with which the singularly lovely pair awaited their dreadful destiny, rose up and demanded of them if they would purchase their deliverance by offering to his own statue that act of adoration which they had refused to pay to that of the gods.

“Vain and presumptuous fellow-mortal, no!” was the simultaneous reply of the intrepid friends; and at that moment Lælia encountered the eyes of Quintus Flavius, who with his bride was among the spectators assembled to witness the attractive pageant of the martyrdom of herself and her Christian friends. Although that sight brought back the fleeting colour to her pale cheek, it possessed no power to ruffle the lofty composure with which she was prepared to meet

the last scene of life, notwithstanding the terrors with which it was accompanied.

Faith had winged her spirit for its heavenward flight; and if that once dear object of her love did indeed occupy her latest thought on earth, it was because that thought was employed in a prayer to her heavenly Father that it would please Him to open his eyes to the knowledge of the truth, and forgive him the crime of having assisted at her sacrifice.

All eyes were now turned upon the youthful victims, for the signal had been given by the barbarous emperor himself for the admission of the less inhuman beasts of prey into the already blood-stained arena, and two fierce and ravenous lions rushed furiously upon the scene, with a roar that shook the amphitheatre to its very foundations.

The young Briton surveyed the infuriated animals with a fearless look; then extending her arms towards Lælia, she exclaimed, "Shall we not die together, my friend?"





PR 5499 .S2 A6 C.1
Aida, the British captive,
Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 041 030 003

DATE DUE			

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004

